

# **“I Know My Redeemer Lives”**

## **An Exposition of the Book of Job**

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**Based upon a series of sermons preached at Christ Reformed Church**

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## “This Man Was Blameless”

*Texts: Job 1:1-5; Galatians 6:7-10*

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The Book of Job is one of the most moving and profound stories known to humanity. Here is the account of a righteous and godly man, nearly overwhelmed by the loss of everything he owned and by the death of most everyone he loved, and who now sick and afflicted beyond words, comes face to face with the sovereign God who brought all of these things to pass. And all the while, Job struggles to believe God’s promise to rescue him from his plight when every circumstance and every word offered in explanation only serves to call into question either Job’s righteousness or God’s goodness. It is not only a moving and fascinating story but almost all of us can relate to what we will read in this book. Many of us have been called to suffer and we certainly empathize with Job’s plight. It is likely that we all know people like Job’s wife and friends who mean well, but who only make things worse every time they open their mouths.

But what makes the Book of Job so important for our consideration is the fact that in the life of Job we come face to face with a number of fundamental and inescapable biblical truths: (1) God’s absolute sovereignty over all of our lives (including our health and our personal circumstances). (2) The fact of human sin and finitude in contrast to the depths of God’s wisdom and holiness, and (3) The well-intended, but terribly flawed words of counsel from Job’s wife and friends, which only add insult to injury. This wonderful, moving, and utterly profound book is indeed what Francis Andersen describes as “one of the supreme offerings of the human mind to the living God and one of the best gifts of God to men.”<sup>1</sup>

As we begin to study this most profound of biblical books, we will begin by describing the nature and character of this book and meet its central character—this blameless and righteous man, named Job, who feared God and shunned evil. It should come as no surprise that critical scholars often see Job as a work of fiction because the origins of this book are unknown and remain shrouded in mystery. But it is clear from Ezekiel’s prophecy (14:14, 20), that Israel’s prophets did not believe this story to be mythological since Job was mentioned by Ezekiel alongside of Noah and Daniel as men known for their righteous conduct in the face of unbelievers. In James 5:11, the apostle speaks of Job as a prophet, whose perseverance in the face of great suffering was based upon his hope that God was full of compassion and mercy and would bring to pass all of the things he has promised, even when things appear to be beyond hope. Job’s faithfulness is held out as something God’s people are to emulate in times of trial and persecution. Therefore, Job must be considered an historical individual, whose intense suffering and personal experience is substantially recorded for us in the pages of this book.<sup>2</sup>

Undoubtedly, the story of Job was passed down across the generations either as oral tradition or as a written document before coming to an unknown author, a man who lived between the time of Solomon and Israel’s exile in Babylon. This places the time of the writing of the Book of Job in that period when

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<sup>1</sup> Francis L. Andersen, *Job: Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, 1974), p. 15.

<sup>2</sup> Meredith G. Kline, “Job,” in *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, edited Charles F. Pfeiffer and Everett F. Harrison (Chicago: Moody Press, 1976), p. 459.

Israel's wisdom literature (i.e., the Psalms and Proverbs) was being composed. Although the Book of Job contains a mixture of almost every type of literature found in the Old Testament, it is most often grouped under the heading of "wisdom literature", which is why the Book of Job is placed in our Bibles before the Psalms, Proverbs and Ecclesiastes.<sup>3</sup> Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, this unknown author produced from these earlier sources what is now our canonical Book of Job.

We also know this to be the case from the literary structure of the book itself. The prologue (chapters 1-2), God's speeches (chapters 38-42:6) and the epilogue (42:7-17) all use the covenantal name of God (YHWH), while neither Job nor his friends use this name in the various speeches we find throughout the middle chapters which are a series of discourses between Job and his friends. The introduction and conclusion were added or edited later since they contain information Job would have never had—i.e., the heavenly scene in chapters 1 and 2. This particular literary structure is described as a "sandwich style" in which the central core of the story (a series of poetic speeches running from chapters 3-46:2) is surrounded by a prologue and an epilogue.<sup>4</sup>

This means that the man Job probably lived well before the time of Moses, most likely during the time of Abraham and the patriarchs. There are no references made in the Book of Job to any of those events which are part and parcel of Israel's history, such as the call of Abraham or Israel's bondage and deliverance from Egypt. Nor does Job make any reference to things like the temple or the monarchy. As one writer points out, it is rather astonishing how detached from Israel's history this book is.<sup>5</sup> Yet, Job's friends—like Job himself—are not pagans, but God-fearers, all of which points us to the time of Abraham and the patriarchs, somewhere between 2000-1500 BC.

There are a number of factors which reinforce placing Job's life during this time-frame. The first is a theological reason. As Calvin points out, "In fact, from the time of Abraham, Melchizedek had the Church of God, and sacrifices which were without any pollution. And so, although the greater part of the world was wrapped in many errors . . . God had reserved some little seed for himself who were retained under the pure truth, indeed waiting for God to establish His Church."<sup>6</sup> In other words, God has always had true believers upon the earth who are difficult to account for because they come to faith in extraordinary ways—one of them being Job. Thus, as we work our way throughout this book, we must remember that Job's trial and suffering occur toward the beginning of redemptive history when very little special revelation had been given. And yet, Job clearly knew that the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob was the true and living God.

Yet another reason why we can reasonably put Job in the time of the patriarchs can be found in the

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<sup>3</sup> Andersen, Job, p. 33.

<sup>4</sup> For helpful discussions of the background to Job see the works of Andersen (pp. 15-76) and Kline (pp. 459-461) cited above, along with those of John E. Hartley, The Book of Job: The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1988), pp. 3-63; and R. K. Harrison, Introduction to the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1979), pp. 1022-1046.

<sup>5</sup> Andersen, Job, p. 62.

<sup>6</sup> John Calvin, Sermons from Job (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980), p. 9.

details of the book itself. Like the patriarchs, Job lived more than one hundred years (42:16). His great personal wealth stems from the size of his herds (1:3) and he acted as the priest of his family (1:5). The mention of both the Sabeans (1:15) and Chaldeans (1:17) also points us to the fact that Job lived at some point during the time of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. His story was passed down to successive generations until Job was composed by an unknown author in its present form, probably during the time of Solomon about 970 BC.<sup>7</sup>

What makes the story of Job so compelling is the fact that it deals with something with which every Christian must wrestle—God’s sovereign control over every area of our lives. We have no problem believing that God determines how tall we will be, whether we are male or female, who our parents are and what nationality we will be. We do not doubt that God determines what gifts and skills we will have, as well as whether or not we are born to means or poverty. We accept the fact that God determines the circumstances of our lives—including our health, length of life and whatever calamities may befall us. We accept these things without question. We all nod in agreement to the assertion that “God is sovereign.” At least we nod in agreement until God does something we may not like nor understand.

As Christians, we also believe in original sin. All people who enter this world are guilty for Adam’s sin as well as their own. Therefore, whenever someone suffers, the easy answer as to why they suffer is to go to our theological default setting. Why do people suffer? We suffer because we are sinners. We are being punished for what we did.

But this is not what happens to Job. Job, we are told, is a righteous man, blameless before God and his fellow men and yet he suffers the loss of everything. All of his possessions. All of his children. He even loses his health, becoming a miserable wretch covered with sores.

And yet we also read that Job was blameless and upright, that he feared God and shunned evil. In fact, it is Job’s wife and friends who point out to Job that his suffering must have come about because he is a sinner and therefore deserves to suffer because he must have done something to cause God to punish him. The story of Job is the story of the suffering of the righteous, not of the wicked, and this is why this book strikes such a chord with us. Why do we suffer when we have done nothing to deserve it?

This is a very important thing to keep in mind as we work our way through this book. It is common for people to suggest that the Book of Job is really an answer to theodicy—supposedly, in this book we find an answer to the nagging question as to how a good God can allow evil and the suffering of his creatures. To this very important question we often hear the following answers. Some attempt to solve this problem by denying that God is all-powerful. Arminians contend that God voluntarily limits his sovereignty so as to allow humans to exercise their freedom. Even worse, open theists believe that God is within time, and is therefore truly limited as to what he can actually do about evil. God can direct evil, he can respond to it so as to minimize its consequences and he can reward those who suffer. But ultimately, God is unable to control evil, because he is truly limited. “Oh, yes, God will win in the end”, they say, but in the meantime, this is how it is. God suffers with us. He learns with us as we suffer. He strives against evil in and through us. And maybe, just maybe, if we strive with him, things will come out all right in the end. But this approach obviously fails, because the “god” of open theists is not the God of the Bible. He is nothing but a figment of sinful human imagination.

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<sup>7</sup> See the “Introduction” to Job in the [NIV Study Bible](#), pp. 731-33.

Another answer to the question of why a good God allows evil is to say that God is sovereign over all things, including evil, but that God is not necessarily good. In many ways, this is the impersonal “god” of Islam, or even what is commonly called “fate.” Of course, the question which lurks behind this approach to the problem of evil is that God has a dark side, that he manifests himself as either a God of love or a God of vengeance, as he wills, and we never know which it will be. Surely, this is why our contemporaries get very nervous when we as Reformed Christians talk about God’s sovereignty and speak of things like election and predestination.

People fear God’s sovereignty because deep down inside they fear that a sovereign God cannot be completely good. People like Dave Hunt tell us that the absolutely sovereign God of the Calvinists cruelly sends millions to hell. He causes people to suffer.<sup>8</sup> Unless such people establish a prominent role for human freedom, they have no explanation as to why people suffer. Thus, they recoil in horror because they think that Calvinism’s sovereign “god” is actually cruel (and perhaps demonic). But this answer fails because it cannot address the biblical data which clearly teaches that God foreordains whatsoever comes to pass, but is in no sense the author of evil.<sup>9</sup>

The third possible answer to the question as to why a good God allows suffering is that people are basically sinful. So, if they suddenly suffer, it must be because they have done something wrong which brought about God’s judgment upon them. The ancients believed that God was sovereign and that people were sinful, but linked these two things together in such a way that the degree to which someone suffered was also the degree to which they had sinned. This is the view held by Job’s wife and his friends. This is a view held by many people today—including many of our own friends and family. This not only solves the problem raised by theodicy—“how can a good God allow evil?”—but provides the theological categories through which Job’s friends attempt to aid him in the midst of his suffering. Why is Job suffering? He must have done something wrong. Since God punishes sinners and since Job is suffering, (the logic runs) so too, Job must have provoked God to anger through some particular sin. Job must be getting what his deeds deserved.

But the Book of Job was not written to answer such a theodicy. This is not a book of apologetics, designed to give an answer to the problem of evil. This is a book for God’s people, many of whom he will call to suffer. Don’t miss the obvious. Job was a righteous and upright man. According to the prologue of this book, Job did not commit some horrible sin which provoked God’s punishment. In light of Paul’s instructions in the Book of Galatians (6:7-10), Job did not sow to the flesh. On the contrary, Job sowed to the Spirit. Therefore, Job was known for doing good, especially to his own family. Job was such a righteous man that God even brought Job to the attention of Satan.

Thus the question raised and answered in the Book of Job (perhaps not to our satisfaction) is not that of the typical theodicy—“how could a good God allow evil?”—but rather that question which every believer has asked at one time or another, “why do the righteous suffer?” Why is it that someone like Job, who believes God’s promise and whose righteous conduct was clearly a fruit of his faith in YHWH, why does such a person suffer? And by extension, we ask “why do any of us suffer, especially, if we, like Job, are

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<sup>8</sup> See, for example, Hunt’s self-serving caricature of the Reformed faith in: Dave Hunt and James White, Debating Calvinism (Sisters Oregon: Multnomah Publishers, 2004).

<sup>9</sup> See my essay, “Human and God’s Purpose: Some Thoughts on the Doctrine of Divine Concurrence,” in *Modern Reformation* (September/October 2002).

blameless and upright, in that we love God and shun evil?” It is the suffering of the righteous—not the problem of evil in general—which is addressed by the story of Job.

The great irony of this story is that the reader knows why all of this is coming to pass, while Job has no idea as to why God allows all of these horrible things to happen. The reader knows what Job does not—that God has summoned Satan, pointed Job out to him, and then said to the Accuser, “have you considered my righteous servant Job?” “There is no one on the earth like him.” Satan sees this challenge as a great opportunity. Not only can he demonstrate that people love God only insofar as God blesses them, but neither can Satan resist the opportunity to afflict the man who is the apple of God’s eye. Take away Job’s possessions, his loved ones, and his health, and God’s plan to entice people to love him will be exposed for what it is—divine bribery.

And so, Satan reasons, Job is not really righteous. His righteousness is ultimately self-serving. He obeys God because God blesses him if he does so. Satan dares to ask God, “Let me take away the blessings and see if Job still loves you.” Job’s supposed “righteousness” will be shown to be nothing but self-interest and, therefore, “sin.” God’s demands for righteousness and the dispensing of covenant blessings and curses will be exposed as divine bribery.<sup>10</sup>

But once Satan has taken up the challenge, God must permit his arch-enemy to remove all those things which God is supposedly using to bribe Job so as to behave righteously. And Job must pass the test. This righteous man must endure this unspeakable ordeal without knowing how the story will end. Only the reader knows why Job’s ordeal comes about. Job must rely upon his faith in YHWH’s goodness, even in the face of overwhelming evidence and what appears to be wise theological counsel to the contrary. Job must believe to the bitter end that God will do what is right and that Job somehow and in some way will be vindicated in the end. Job knows that God does not retributively punish those who obey his commandments. Job knows that God does not punish blameless and upright people. And Job knows that he is righteous and upright before the Lord. Yet, the reality is that blameless and upright people suffer. So Job (and the reader) must struggle to understand why.

**I**t is with this historical background and theological purpose of Job in mind, we now turn to the first few verses of this book so as to meet that man in whom this amazing story centers.

In verse 1, we read the following. “*In the land of Uz there lived a man whose name was Job. This man was blameless and upright; he feared God and shunned evil.*” The land of Uz lies in that region to the east of the River Jordan (*Qedem*—“the east”) in what is now the nation of Jordan, anywhere between Edom on the south, Moab on the east, and the land of the Aram to the north. While Job was not an Israelite—since no tribal or family identification is given—he clearly worships Israel’s God, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.<sup>11</sup> So, apparently, do his friends and family.

But as the story opens and we meet the central character, what stands out is the assertion that Job was “*blameless and upright*” and that “*he feared God and shunned evil.*” What does this mean? One thing it does not mean is that Job was sinless or that he had attained a state of victory over all sin. We know this to be the case because elsewhere in this book Job clearly declares himself to be a sinner. In Job 7:20, Job

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<sup>10</sup> “Introduction” to Job in the *NIV Study Bible*, pp. 731-33.

<sup>11</sup> Andersen, *Job*, p. 77.

laments, *“If I have sinned, what have I done to you, O watcher of men?”* Then in Job 13:26, Job laments *“For you write down bitter things against me and make me inherit the sins of my youth.”* Finally, in Job 16:16 -17, Job states that *“Surely then you will count my steps but not keep track of my sin. My offenses will be sealed up in a bag; you will cover over my sin.”*

If Job acknowledges himself to be a sinner, what does it mean when Job is described as being “blameless and upright?” The answer is simple. It means exactly what it says—Job was blameless and upright. He feared God and shunned evil. Job was an honest and moral man, who avoided evil. In chapters 29-31, Job can appeal to the public knowledge of his piety, which is the visible manifestation of his faith. Thus, when we read that Job was blameless and upright, we understand this to mean that Job believed YHWH’s promise to forgive his sins and, like Abraham, Job was justified through faith. Job believes and confesses that YHWH will cover his sins and through that act of faith, Christ’s righteousness was reckoned to Job, just as it was to Abraham.

But Job’s faith in YHWH bore much fruit of the Spirit, fruit which was tangible to all who knew him and fruit which was especially pleasing to YHWH. As one writer puts it, “there was an honest harmony between Job’s profession and his life, quite the opposite of the hypocrisy of which he was presently accused by Satan and later by his friends.”<sup>12</sup> Let me put it this way. Having been justified by faith, Job lived in such a way that his conduct before men was blameless and upright, in contrast to someone who is indifferent to the things of God, or who hypocritically professes one thing, but lives like that profession makes no difference.

Job’s conduct was exemplary (some of it is described in the following verses in the way he served as priest of his family). In Job 4:3-6, one of Job’s friends can declare of Job, *“Think how you have instructed many, how you have strengthened feeble hands. Your words have supported those who stumbled; you have strengthened faltering knees. But now trouble comes to you, and you are discouraged; it strikes you, and you are dismayed. Should not your piety be your confidence and your blameless ways your hope?”* In Job 42:8, when God rebukes one of Job’s friends by saying, *“My servant Job will pray for you, and I will accept his prayer and not deal with you according to your folly. You have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has.”* In this we see that Job is a righteous man. Not only by virtue of his justification through faith, but by virtue of his daily conduct. Therefore when Job suffers, it is not because he has some secret sin, or because God is punishing Job because he has done something which provokes God to anger.

This is precisely why Satan sets out to expose Job’s obedience as phony and explains why the Lord allows Job to be put to the test. Even if God turned Satan to an ash at that very moment, the question about human righteousness resulting from divine bribery would never be answered. Job was truly blameless and upright. Job had done nothing to bring about the trial that is about to befall him. He feared God and shunned evil. Hence God allows Satan to put Job to the test to vindicate God’s righteous dealing with his creatures.

This also explains why Job has every right to cry out for God to vindicate his good name. After all, God has promised not to punish the blameless. But why then does Job suffer if he has done nothing wrong? That is the question which this book will seek to answer. And that answer is found in the wisdom and purpose of God.

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<sup>12</sup> Kline, “Job,” p. 461.

In verses 2 and 3, we learn something of Job's personal circumstances before his ordeal begins. *"He had seven sons and three daughters, and he owned seven thousand sheep, three thousand camels, five hundred yoke of oxen and five hundred donkeys, and had a large number of servants. He was the greatest man among all the people of the East."* As a servant of YHWH, Job took the creation mandate seriously—he had a large family (some have thought that the numbers of his children, seven sons and three daughters, are numbers indicating completeness and God's blessing) and his wealth, indicated by the large number of animals and servants, is obviously the manifestation of God's favor.<sup>13</sup>

Job's piety can be clearly seen in what follows. We read in verses 4-5 that Job's *"sons used to take turns holding feasts in their homes, and they would invite their three sisters to eat and drink with them. When a period of feasting had run its course, Job would send and have them purified. Early in the morning he would sacrifice a burnt offering for each of them, thinking, 'Perhaps my children have sinned and cursed God in their hearts.' This was Job's regular custom."* Not only does Job function as a priest to his family, Job knew that there was no forgiveness of sin apart from the shedding of blood. Burnt offerings not only point ahead to a coming messianic redeemer, but were also a means of consecration. Job ensured that his own and his families' sins were covered, but he continually dedicated everything that he had unto the Lord.<sup>14</sup> Here we can see in part what it means when we read that Job was blameless and upright. Job was the priest of his home and he acknowledged that everything he had came to him from the hand of a gracious God. Everyone who witnessed this knew that Job was the greatest man in the east. And this is that man whom God will point out to Satan, thereby plunging him into this great ordeal.

**W**hat, then, are to learn from these opening verses of Job?

There are three things we need to note about Job. First, Job occupies a unique role in redemptive history, unlike that of any other. Second, Job is in many ways a type of Christ. And third, Job is an example for us to follow in the midst of our own suffering.

As to the first point, Job occupies a very unique role in redemptive history. Although we know little about the man himself (other than he was very pious), we know that Job lived early on in the story of redemption, when very little information about the coming redeemer had been revealed. But Job believed in the God of Abraham, made burnt offerings for the forgiveness of his sins and those of his family and to consecrate his family unto the Lord. YHWH himself took delight in Job's upright living and blameless behavior. It is God who brings Job to the attention of Satan, thereby setting in motion the ordeal Job was about to undergo. This means that in many ways Job's ordeal is unique. This is important for us to keep in mind, because when we suffer, unlike Job, we do not suffer at the hands of the Devil. Job lived well before the coming of Christ and Christ's defeat of Satan at the cross (cf. Colossians 2:15), which resulted in what John describes in Revelation 12:7 as a war in heaven, when the Devil was cast down from heaven to earth. Satan no longer has access to the throne of God. He cannot accuse us or attempt to barter with God about our personal circumstances.

Furthermore, Job is unique in that not only does he demonstrate a remarkable piety—the Lord himself says there is no one else like Job—but Job's ordeal and its outcome proves that all of God's dealings with his creatures are just and righteous, even if we do not understand why God does what he does. While the

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<sup>13</sup> Cf. Kline, "Job," p. 461 and Andersen, *Job*, p. 79.

<sup>14</sup> Kline, "Job," p. 461.

secret things belong to the Lord, in this story we struggle to answer the question once asked by Abraham, “will not the judge of the whole earth do what is right?” In the story of Job we see that the answer is “yes.” God always does what is right, even if his purposes remain hidden from us until we enter his presence. We may not know the answer now, but we will then.

Second, while Job’s great piety is unique, Job is still a sinner, who must offer sacrifices for his sin. While he is faultless and blameless and sows to the Spirit, not to the flesh, Job was born in sin and as a child of Adam must taste the sting of death. In the words of one writer, “Job is as faultless as any man can be. He is not everyman. He is unique. God boasts that ‘there is none like him on the earth’ (1:8; 2:3). As such he presents the case of an innocent sufferer in what is almost its acutest form. In one life only is Job excelled, both in innocence and in grief: in Jesus, who sinned not at all, but who endured the greatest agony of any man. In His perfection of obedience and of suffering the question of Job and of all us have their final answer.”<sup>15</sup>

While Job passed his test, he did so only for himself and to prove God’s wisdom in the face of Satan’s challenge. But Jesus Christ endured a far greater test than Job, and he did so on behalf of all of God’s people. Jesus Christ alone was without sin and fulfilled all righteousness, something even Job’s great piety could not accomplish for himself, let alone others.

Third, as a justified sinner, Job, like Abraham, is a member of the covenant of grace, because through the means of faith, Job received the righteousness of Jesus Christ. Job believes God’s promise. He offers sacrifices for sin, on behalf of himself and his family. But Job also offers these sacrifices to consecrate himself, his family and all of his possessions to his creator and redeemer. This, too, is part of membership in the covenant.<sup>16</sup> Thus in many ways Job is just like us. He is what we commonly call “a good Christian” or a “faithful” or pious man. Job is above reproach which, by the way, is one of the requirements for men to serve in Christ’s church as a minister, elder or deacon. He did as Paul instructs all of us to do in Galatians 6:8-9: “*The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.*” This was true for Job. It should be true for us as well. Job’s piety is an example of that kind of piety that should be manifest in our lives.

But we also learn from Job how we should respond to suffering, should this be God’s purpose for us. When Job is called to suffer, he does not curse God, nor seek to take his own life. Because he is blameless, Job has every right to cry out for vindication—as do we if we have sown to the Spirit. Job is not suffering because he has done something wrong. Rather Job is suffering because God has a purpose for his ordeal—as yet unknown to Job.

Unlike Job, we know how the story ends. And even when Job suffers beyond human comprehension, he still declares, “*I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth (19:25).*” How much more should we do the same. For we see what Job does not—that the redeemer’s agony on the cross is but the prelude to the victory won in the empty tomb and the exaltation of our Lord’s Ascension. For the one who suffered for our sins, dying in unspeakable agony which transcends Job’s, has now been

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<sup>15</sup> Andersen, *Job*, p. 79.

<sup>16</sup> Kline, “Job,” p. 461.

given that name that is above every other name and is now King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

Job knew that God in his wisdom would do what is right and even in the midst of his suffering tried not to look back—“what have I done to deserve this?” For the answer was not to be found in the past—“woulda,” “coulda,” “shoulda.” “If only I had . . .” Instead, Job looks ahead to that time when the wisdom and purposes of God will finally be revealed. And in this, Job is a fitting and wonderful example for us. For in the midst of our suffering, Job points us to Jesus Christ, who is the man of sorrows, fully acquainted with grief, and yet at the same time is that blessed Redeemer who stood upon the earth. For even in the midst of his grief, loss and agony, Job knew one fundamental fact which enabled him to endure—*“I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth”*

We have seen that one of whom Job speaks, and he is Jesus Christ our Lord, that one in whom human sin and the mysteries of human suffering find their answer. Amen.

## “Have You Considered My Servant, Job?”

*Texts: Job 1:6-2:10; Revelation 12:1-12*

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The veil between the seen and the unseen has been lifted. The heavenly court is in session. The Lord is on his throne and legions of angels are present. Summoned by God, Satan comes before the court as the accuser of God’s people. But this time it is the Lord who directs Satan’s attention to his righteous servant, Job. Seeing an opportunity to attack the foundation of the gospel, Satan takes up the Lord’s challenge, calling into question Job’s righteousness. According to the Accuser, Job is a hypocrite. Job is blameless and upright, fears God and shuns evil, only because God bribes him to do so by giving Job great wealth and personal comfort. Take all these things away—Satan argues—and Job’s supposed piety will be exposed for what it is—a lie. And so with God’s challenge issued and accepted by Satan, the wisdom and goodness of God is at stake. Job must enter into a trial by ordeal, a trial he must endure and from which he must emerge victorious, so that God’s wisdom will be vindicated and that all his ways—mysterious as they may be—will be proven right.<sup>1</sup>

We now come to that section of Job in which the mysterious purpose underlying Job’s horrific ordeal is revealed—the vindication of God’s wisdom in his dealing with all of his creatures, especially as it relates to the gospel and God’s redemption of sinners. As we will see in Job 1:6-2:10, Job will lose everything he has except his life, his wife and three of his friends. As the scope of the disaster faced by Job becomes fully apparent, the reader begins to realize that Job would be much better off without his wife and friends as well, since his wife behaves like Eve (unwittingly serving the purposes of the Devil) and since his friends only contribute to Job’s suffering through their seemingly wise, but utterly flawed theological counsel.

The story of Job is the classic tale of the suffering of a righteous man. But the account of Job’s trial by ordeal is also given to us by God to reveal something far less obvious, but every bit as important as offering comfort to those who suffer. As the story of Job unfolds, we will see that God’s wisdom is ultimately revealed in a perfectly just and infinitely merciful Savior, whose ways may be mysterious, but which are always proved righteous.<sup>2</sup> Not only does the Book of Job force us to wrestle with the question, “why do the righteous suffer?” but the answer which Job learns through his own suffering is that God is righteous in all his dealings with his creatures and always does what is right, even if this is beyond our understanding.

The awareness of this great truth forces us to bow the knee to that one who created us, who ordained all the circumstances of our lives and the number of our days, and who then sent his own sinless son to save us from the consequences of human sin and finitude. In the story of Job, we not only encounter the mystery of suffering, we also encounter the wisdom of God in the person of Jesus Christ in whom all the

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<sup>1</sup> M. G. Kline, *Glory in Our Midst* (Overland Park, KS: Two-Age Press, 2001), p. 100.

<sup>2</sup> Meredith G. Kline, “Job,” in *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, edited Charles F. Pfeiffer and Everett F. Harrison (Chicago: Moody Press, 1976), p. 462

mysteries of human existence are fully and finally answered.

Recall from our introductory sermon, the Book of Job is not a book of apologetics designed to give us an answer to the problem of evil. Rather, the Book of Job is an account of the suffering of a righteous man who had done nothing whatsoever to bring about the horrific trial he was about to endure. In his suffering, Job is not only an example to us of how we should face suffering (should God bring such suffering and loss into our own lives), but the ordeal of Job plays an important role in redemptive history.

The first man, Adam, failed his time of testing in Eden, thereby plunging the entire human race into sin. Once Adam rebelled against God, and the gospel had been declared in Genesis 3:15, Job must endure a time of testing so as to vindicate God's wisdom in dealing with sinners. Job must do this not only to confound Satan's attack upon the gospel, but also to reveal to the human race that through his own suffering and upright conduct, a righteousness is even now being revealed which points us ahead to the perfect and faultless righteousness of the second Adam yet to come. As Job endures the loss of his health and all he owns, God triumphs over Satan's hatred of the gospel and contempt of the human race.<sup>3</sup> As Job endures in the midst of his suffering, we get our first glimpse of how God will fulfill all righteousness and crush the head of the Accuser. In the trial and ordeal of Job, we see what will be required for sinners to be justified—the perfect obedience of Jesus Christ.

That the story of Job is on one level a story about the gospel, can be seen in the opening words of this great book. In Job 1:1 we read that Job was a blameless and upright man, who feared God and who shunned evil. Like Abraham (who lived about the same time), Job believed God's promise to provide a redeemer to take away the guilt of his sins, and was justified through the means of faith and on account of the merits of the coming redeemer, Jesus Christ. But Job's faith in the promised redeemer bore much fruit as seen in Job's life of gratitude to God. So much so that Job's great piety was widely known and admired by all who knew him. Job acted as priest of his family, regularly offering burnt sacrifices on behalf of his seven sons and three daughters, whom he loved very dearly. Job was so pious, the Lord can say about him, there was no one else like him on the earth! A wealthy man, Job owned large numbers of animals and employed many servants. He was considered "the greatest man among all the people of the east." All of this was the fruit of Job's faith in God's promise to save him from his sins.

Before we take up the scene before the heavenly court and the results of the decision issued by that court, we need to keep in mind that the readers of this book know what Job does not. Job does not know about the courtroom scene, nor the challenge to the gospel raised by the Devil. Job has no idea of what is about to befall him. Nor does Job know the reason why a series of horrible things will take place leaving him sick and with nothing. All Job knows after losing everything is that somehow and in some way, God will do what is right and that Job will be vindicated in the end. In this, Job is an example for all of us.

Despite the temptation to dwell on the past and despite the counsel given him by his friends to look back at his life to find the reason why he lost everything—"what did you do that brought all of this to pass?"—instead, Job looks ahead to the future. It is Job who tells us in chapter 19:25: "*I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth.*" It is Job, while in the midst of pain and loss beyond our imagination, who points us to the coming redeemer. When his wife tells him to curse God and die, when his friends tell him that he is only getting what he deserved, it is Job, who refuses to blame God and instead praises the name of the Lord. It is the suffering and miserable Job, who

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<sup>3</sup> Kline, "Job," p. 464.

is both a type of Christ—the true man of sorrows—as well as a prophet who directs our gaze ahead to that final day when God will indeed turn all our suffering to good.

**W**e now turn to the first part of our text (verses 6-12 of chapter 1), where the divine purpose underlying Job’s trial is revealed.

While the first five verses of Job tell us something about the man Job and his particular circumstances, beginning in verse 6 of the opening chapter the scene shifts to the heavenly court which is in session. We read “*one day the angels came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came with them.*” This is one of the few passages in the Bible where the veil is removed from the angelic world, which is otherwise invisible to human eyes. YHWH is seated on his throne, ruling over all and surrounded by the hosts of heaven. The scene is reminiscent of Zechariah chapter 3, when Satan brings charges against Joshua, Israel’s high priest.<sup>4</sup>

In Job, Satan is the “Accuser,” or more literally, “the Adversary.” His appearance before the court most likely means that the Devil is obligated to appear before the heavenly court when summoned by God. It is also clear from what transpires, that Satan cannot touch Job until given permission to do so. God’s sovereignty over all things is absolute, including the activities and operations of the Devil. As Luther once put it, “the Devil is God’s Devil.” That is, Satan cannot do anything which God does not permit him to do. Satan is a creature, bound to submit to God and not in any sense God’s equal.

But our situation is quite different from that of Job. Job lived before the coming of Christ and the cross, while we live after Christ crushed Satan’s head. As we read in Revelation 12:1-12, with the coming of Jesus Christ, Satan has been cast from the heaven and no longer has access to the heavenly court. In Revelation 12:7-9, we read “*there was war in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven. The great dragon was hurled down--that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him.*” Furthermore, Satan has been bound and confined to the great abyss as depicted in Revelation 20:1-3.

The eviction of Satan from heaven accounts for two important theological facts. First, Satan no longer has access to the throne of God. He can no longer accuse us or bargain with God about our particular circumstances. If we suffer, it is not because the circumstances involved are beyond the control of God, as if the Devil was free to do to us what he wanted. Satan is now a defeated foe, utterly humiliated by the cross. Second, we need to consider that Satan is now cast to earth where he wages a furious war against the church through the propagation of lies and heresies, since Satan is elsewhere called the father of all lies since he was a liar from the beginning (John 8:44). In Revelation 12:12, we read that Satan “*is filled with fury, because he knows that his time is short.*” Having been defeated, and knowing that his doom is sure, Satan is like a wounded animal, perhaps more dangerous than before. After the cross, his weapons are not lightning, whirlwinds and boils, but heresy and schism in the church. It is Satan who will attempt to trick us into despair by propagating lies about the goodness of God.

As we glimpse the heavenly court described in Job 1:7, we read that “*The LORD said to Satan, ‘Where have you come from?’ Satan answered the LORD, ‘From roaming through the earth and going back and forth in it.’*” This is but another way of affirming what Peter declares of the Devil in 1 Peter 5:8. “*Your*

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<sup>4</sup> Kline, Glory in Our Midst, pp. 99-102.

*enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.”* The Lord now directs Satan’s attention to the man Job, whom one writer describes as a creation of God’s redemptive grace.<sup>5</sup> As a fallen son of Adam, Job has been justified by grace through faith and now manifests the fruit of the Spirit. Thus we read in verse 8, “*Then the LORD said to Satan, ‘Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil.’*”

This remarkable assertion goes beyond the declaration of verse 1. Not only was Job blameless and upright, his piety was so great that “*there was no one else on earth like him.*” This man is the apple of God eye and manifests a faint glimmer of that perfect righteousness we will later see in the life of Jesus Christ. In the similar scene found in Zechariah 3, Satan can find all kinds of sin in Joshua the high priest. In that instance, God’s response is to strip off Joshua’s dirty garments and give him clean ones, pointing us to the glorious righteousness of Christ. But Satan can find nothing in Job’s life which he can point out and condemn. Job’s piety—the fruit of justifying faith—is truly remarkable. There is no one else like him.

Since Job is blameless and upright, Satan takes another tact. He attacks Job’s righteous behavior by contending that this faultlessness and blamelessness is not sincere. Job is being bribed with wealth and the pleasures of family in exchange for his good behavior. Job is not obedient because he loves God. Rather, in his twisted mind, Satan reasons that Job is obedient because he loves the good things God has given him. Take away all of the goodies, Satan contends, and Job’s faith and piety will quickly disappear. God’s plan to redeem sinners will be shown to be a failure. And so in verses 9-11, Satan responds to God’s question by taking up the challenge. “*‘Does Job fear God for nothing?’ Satan replied. ‘Have you not put a hedge around him and his household and everything he has? You have blessed the work of his hands, so that his flocks and herds are spread throughout the land. But stretch out your hand and strike everything he has, and he will surely curse you to your face.’*”

It is important that we not miss that this is the exact opposite of the approach Satan took in Eden. In Eden, the Devil appeared to Adam and attacked the righteous ways of God. Here, the Devil appears before God and attacks a righteous man. Despite the different point of attack, the basic tactics used by the Devil are still the same. Satan starts with a subtle question, but then draws the most blasphemous of conclusions.<sup>6</sup> Job is not righteous—he loves all the things given to him by God. And God is not righteous—he is a cosmic blackmailer. Take away Job’s possessions and Job’s piety will vanish. God’s method of redeeming sinners will be proven to be an abject failure. Bribery may get superficial results, but divine bribery cannot ultimately redeem sinners. Therefore, we must not miss the fact that by afflicting Job, Satan is attacking the very foundation of the gospel—the justice and mercy of God.

Notice, too, that all of what follows in the trials and travails of Job stems from a sovereign act of God. It is God who directs Satan’s attention to Job, unlike the account in Zechariah 3, where Satan tattles on Israel’s priest because of his sins. We read of God’s direction in verse 12, so that “*the LORD said to Satan, ‘Very well, then, everything he has is in your hands, but on the man himself do not lay a finger.’ Then Satan went out from the presence of the LORD.*” What follows then, is the account of Job’s trial by ordeal—a trial he must endure in order to vindicate God’s redemption of sinners.

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<sup>5</sup> Kline, “Job,” p. 462.

<sup>6</sup> Kline, “Job,” p. 462.

Everyone has suffered. Everyone here has lost something we prize. Some of us have suffered great loss and live in constant pain. But no one here this morning has lost as much as Job. Like a series of tsunamis, the bad news of Satan's handiwork begins to come, wave after wave.

As we pick up the account in verse 13, we read "*one day [probably that day when Job offered burnt offerings] when Job's sons and daughters were feasting and drinking wine at the oldest brother's house, a messenger came to Job and said, 'The oxen were plowing and the donkeys were grazing nearby, and the Sabeans attacked and carried them off. They put the servants to the sword, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!'*" The Sabeans are Arab Bedouins, who not only took all of Job's livestock, they killed all of the servants. This is only the beginning.

According to verse 16, the earth itself seemed to turn against Job. "*While he [the first messenger] was still speaking, another messenger came and said, 'The fire of God [probably a reference to a lightning storm] fell from the sky and burned up the sheep and the servants, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!'*" A devastating blow—but yet another wave of bad news was still to hit. "*While he was still speaking, another messenger came and said, 'The Chaldeans formed three raiding parties and swept down on your camels and carried them off. They put the servants to the sword, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!'*" It is still not over. One more even more painful blow was soon to fall. "*While he was still speaking, yet another messenger came and said, 'Your sons and daughters were feasting and drinking wine at the oldest brother's house, when suddenly a mighty wind swept in from the desert and struck the four corners of the house. It collapsed on them and they are dead, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!'*"

In the span of a few moments, Job learns that all his wealth has been destroyed or stolen and the joy of his life—his seven sons and three daughters—has been taken from him. Only the messengers have been spared so as to bring Job the news that the accumulated fruit of a lifetime of work is now gone. Marauding enemies and nature itself have seemingly conspired to bring Job to his knees. But the way in which this horrible loss occurred not only conceals the hand of God, but also the hand of Satan. Remember, Job does not know of the heavenly scene, nor the permission given to Satan to afflict him. If Job were an atheist, he would have had an explanation for what has just happened. The world is a cruel place. If Job were a polytheist, a dualist, a materialist or a fatalist, he would have had a ready explanation for his loss—human weakness or the forces of nature.<sup>7</sup>

But Job believes in the living God who is sovereign over the forces of nature as well as the enemies to the east. Job knows that his God is supremely good. Therefore, Job knows that these things have befallen him only because the good and almighty God has either brought these things to pass, or else has permitted these things to occur. And this brings us to the mystery of the suffering of the righteous.

The knowledge that God is both good and sovereign serves as the basis for Job's reaction to this horrible news, as recounted in verses 20-21. "*At this, Job got up and tore his robe and shaved his head,*" a common gesture of grief. Overcome with grief, Job "*fell to the ground in worship and said: 'Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised.'*" Even as the reader's heart aches for Job, this grief-stricken man still utters words of faith. As one writer puts it, Job knows "that a man may stand before God stripped of

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<sup>7</sup> Andersen, *Job*, p. 86.

everything, and still lack nothing.”<sup>8</sup> Surely, the sentiment expressed in Psalm 73:25 comes to Job’s mind, “*Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you.*”

Yet Job’s great faith does not relieve his suffering, it only makes it worse.<sup>9</sup> The God whom Job loves has brought this to pass. Job has done nothing to deserve what has happened. And still, Job praises God. As we read in verse 22, “*In all this, Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing.*” Job knows there is a reason for this situation, even if he must wait to discover it. Thus, out of a broken heart pours forth a doxology of praise at news of the loss of all.

**S**till Job’s ordeal is far from over. Things are only going to get worse. A second satanically-inflicted **S**ordeal is about to befall this righteous man. The tension in the story only increases.

A second heavenly scene is revealed. Satan is again summoned before the heavenly court but this time is strangely silent about the results of Job’s first ordeal. It is the Lord who calls Satan’s attention to what has happened to Job. As we read in 2:1-3, “*On another day the angels came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came with them to present himself before him. And the LORD said to Satan, ‘Where have you come from?’ Satan answered the LORD, ‘From roaming through the earth and going back and forth in it.’ Then the LORD said to Satan, ‘Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil. And he still maintains his integrity, though you incited me against him to ruin him without any reason.’”* Job is clearly innocent, for he is blameless and upright, even though his life has been ruined without reason.

The depths of Satan’s cynicism becomes apparent in verse 4. Job praised the Lord, acknowledging that he came into the world naked and he will depart that way as well. Satan sees in this a shrewd attempt by Job to conceal his bitterness and to bargain with God for his health. As Meredith Kline points out, Satan sees Job’s praise in the midst of his loss as a kind of health insurance.<sup>10</sup> Thus in verse 4, we read that Satan’s focus moves to Job’s physical well-being. “*‘Skin for skin!’ Satan replied. This is probably a parody of Job’s lament about being born and dying naked.<sup>11</sup> ‘A man will give all he has for his own life. But stretch out your hand and strike his flesh and bones, and he will surely curse you to your face.’”* Okay, Satan reasons, Job can withstand the loss of his possessions and children, but he will not be able to cope with the loss of his health. Remove Job’s good health, and he’ll curse God.

With the challenge issued and accepted, “God permits the mystery of affliction to engulf his servant.”<sup>12</sup> According to verse 6, “*The LORD said to Satan, ‘Very well, then, he is in your hands; but you must spare his life.’ So Satan went out from the presence of the LORD and afflicted Job with painful sores from the soles of his feet to the top of his head. Then Job took a piece of broken pottery and scraped himself with it as he sat among the ashes.*” While there is great speculation about the precise nature of his illness

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<sup>8</sup> Andersen, *Job*, p. 88.

<sup>9</sup> Andersen, *Job*, p. 89.

<sup>10</sup> Kline, “Job,” p. 463.

<sup>11</sup> Kline, “Job,” p. 463.

<sup>12</sup> Kline, “Job,” p. 463.

(boils, elephantitis, or leprosy), it is difficult to diagnose the exact malady which rendered Job so miserable. We do know that the only relief Job could find was to scrape his skin with pieces of broken pottery. We also know from later references to this disease that it included darkened skin (30:28), rotting and peeling of the skin (30:30) and maggot infested sores (7:5).<sup>13</sup>

The very sight of the greatest man of the east reduced to such a pitiful state shocked everyone. Given the nature of Job's illness and the fear that he might be contagious, Job was now forced to live in the town trash-heap, which served as both a dump and a dunghill. Job has hit rock bottom.

In verse 9, we learn why Satan did not take the life of Job's wife. Mrs. Job reminds us very much of Eve, having given in to the Devil's temptation and now (even if unwittingly) serving as his instrument of the undoing of her husband.<sup>14</sup> Her advice to her husband is exactly what Satan wants, for as we read in verse 9, "*His wife said to him, 'Are you still holding on to your integrity? Curse God and die!'*" These words echo the hope of Satan that Job would curse God to his face once his health has been taken from him. With these words, Job's trial becomes most acute—his own wife and the mother of his children wants him to curse God and die. His own wife thinks he is hiding some great sin.

Again, we see why Job was the apple of God's eye and why the Lord pointed him out to the Accuser. Job replied with great restraint to this unwitting foil of the Devil, "*You are talking like a foolish woman. Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble? In all this, Job did not sin in what he said.*" Job does not speak evil of his wife, but only of her behavior. The great paradox in this is that Mrs. Job lacks wisdom, the very thing God is displaying in infinite measure in the ordeal Job is now facing. If Job has received so many good things from the Lord, he is fully prepared to receive calamity when the Lord sends it. Satan's hope that Job would curse God has come to naught. A righteousness from God is being revealed. In the struggles and obedience of Job, we are pointed to the man of sorrows, Jesus Christ.

**W**hat, then, do we learn from the account of Job and the loss of all his possessions, his children and his health?

As we look at the story of Job in light of the big picture of redemptive history, the story of Job really begins when Satan deceived Eve and then enticed her husband, Adam, to eat the forbidden fruit and plunge the entire human race into sin. But as soon as Adam fell into sin, God preached the gospel to Adam, promising to redeem him from his sins through the promised seed of the woman, who would crush the serpent's head, although the redeemer would himself be bruised in the process. In the ordeal of Job, Satan thinks that he can overturn this promise of redemption by exposing God's plan of redemption as nothing but cosmic bribery. So when God summons Satan and asks him to consider his righteous servant, Job, Satan takes the bait. When Satan afflicts Job, he is attacking God's promise to save sinners.

Unlike Adam, "the sinner Job stands triumphant, while the righteous Adam fell."<sup>15</sup> Not only does Job's faith lead him to praise God, even in the midst of trial, Job's actions thoroughly confound Satan's attack upon the gospel, while at the same time giving proof that God does indeed give a justifying righteousness

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<sup>13</sup> See the discussions in: Andersen, *Job*, p. 91; and Kline, "Job," p. 463.

<sup>14</sup> Kline, "Job," p. 463.

<sup>15</sup> Kline, "Job," p. 464.

to sinners, through the perfect obedience of a second Adam yet to come. In Job's triumph in the midst of this horrible ordeal, we see that there is a righteousness being revealed which is superior to Adam's and which can withstand even the greatest of satanic assaults. Satan's rage cannot overcome the wisdom and justice of God. Job does not like nor understand what has happened. He is utterly heart-broken and bewildered. His suffering is beyond our comprehension. But Job knows that the same God who gave him all good things, will redeem him and deliver him from whatever may befall him.

Take everything Job has away from him, and he still praises the God who made him and who will redeem him. In this ordeal, we see the triumph of God's grace, and learn that we, too, must be willing to accept the trials God sends, along with the good which so richly overflows to us.

In the ordeal of Job, we see the words of Romans 8:28-39, wonderfully fulfilled: *"And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. . . . If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: "For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered." No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."*

Job has lost everything. He is devastated and grief-stricken beyond words. He has gone from being the greatest man of the east to living on the town dunghill, scratching his skin with pieces of pottery. But despite all of this, nothing can separate us from the love of God, certainly not the scheming of Satan. Despite every appearance to the contrary, Job is more than a conqueror. And so are we, if our trust is in Jesus Christ. For nothing can separate from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. Not sickness. Not loss. Not death. God has not promised that we will not suffer. But he has promised that he will turn all evil to good. And this is what we learn from the sufferings of Job, who points us to the suffering and dying of our Savior, that one whose suffering redeems us from our sin, that Savior who knows what human suffering is like, and who promises to restore us and vindicate us in the end.

## “Why?”

*Texts: Job 2:11-3:26; Matthew 27:45-50*

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Job is a blameless and upright man who fears God and shuns evil. The Lord himself says of Job, “*there is no one else like him.*” When this poor man loses everything, nevertheless, he praises God. His herds have been plundered or destroyed. His servants have all been captured or killed. His seven sons and three daughters—the delight of his life—have been tragically killed by a windstorm. Job’s body is now covered with open sores. The greatest man of the east is now a pitiful wretch, banished to the town dunghill. Still Job refuses to curse God or blame him for what has happened. Now completely bewildered and utterly heartbroken, Job begins to wrestle with that haunting question which we all ask at one time or another, “Why?”

We now move from the prologue (chapters 1 and 2), into the heart of the book, a series of speeches which run from chapters three through thirty-one. In a rapid-fire dialogue which almost takes the form of a debate, we hear first from Job (chapter 3) and then from his three friends (Eliphaz, Bildad, Zophar), along with responses to each of these friend’s speeches from Job himself. In chapters 32-37, we will hear the speech from Elihu (who is someone who witnesses the dialogue between Job and his friends) and who must contribute his two cents to the debate. But all of these speeches come to an end when God answers Job’s question “why?” speaking to Job from the midst of a whirlwind as recounted in chapters 38-41. As we work our way through these speeches, you may recognize in the speeches from Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar, bad counsel given you in times of past trial from your own well-intended friends and family. But before we turn to the three cycles of speeches from Job’s three friends, we begin with Job’s lament in Job 3.

In our previous two sermons on Job, we have met the man and learned of his great piety. We have witnessed the heavenly court in session when the veil which separates the seen from the unseen was lifted. We know the critical fact which Job does not—the Devil has taken up God’s challenge to consider his righteous servant Job. By taking up God’s challenge to consider Job, Satan is not only attacking the man who is the apple of God’s eye, but Satan is also attacking the foundation of the gospel. According to Satan, Job serves God out of pure self-interest. According to God, Job is blameless and upright only because God bribes him with wealth and the pleasures of family. Take all these things away—Satan reasons—and Job will curse God to his face. Not only that, but God’s plan to redeem sinners will be exposed as nothing but bribery. With the challenge issued by God and accepted by Satan, Job must undergo a trial by ordeal so as to vindicate God’s altogether righteous, but albeit, mysterious ways in dealing with his creatures.

When a series of terrible disasters befall Job, leaving him with nothing, instead of cursing God as Satan had predicted, Job praises God. We read in Job 1:20-22 that upon learning of the disaster which has befallen him, [Job] *fell to the ground in worship and said: ‘Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked I will depart. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised.’ In all this, Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing.*” Overwhelmed by his great

personal loss and heartbreak, Job's faith is now sorely tested. Had Job been an atheist, there would be a sense of loss and heartache. But as a believer, it is much different. The God who created all things and who promised to redeem Job, and who had blessed him with so much, has now, without apparent reason, taken everything away. Had Job not believed in God, this calamity would have only affirmed the atheist's premise that the world can be a very cruel place. But Job knew the living God. He trusted in God's promise to save him from his sins. He made weekly burnt offerings on behalf of himself and his family. Job knows that he has done nothing wrong to provoke God to anger. He knows that God will not punish him unjustly! And yet, Job has lost everything. The apparent contradiction is inescapable.

This is why the loss of his wealth and family thrusts Job into an intense internal conflict reflected in a series of speeches which makes up the bulk of this book. As the debate unfolds we are forced to tackle the question, "why do the righteous suffer?" We read of Job's pain and anxiety as it spills out from his heart, revealing to us the depths of his pain and suffering. Why did the God whom Job loves so much bring this to pass? Why did this happen? Why does God not vindicate Job's good name? Why?

But if Job thought his ordeal would end with the loss of his wealth and children, he is sadly mistaken. In Job 2:1-6, we read of yet another appearance of Satan before the heavenly court. Notice that Satan does not even mention that the first trial of Job has not turned out the way the Accuser expected. Job did not curse God as Satan had predicted. No, Job praised God despite the loss of everything he owned and the death of his seven sons and three daughters.

Summoned a second time to come before the heavenly court, Satan tries another line of attack. Take away Job's health—Satan tells the Lord—and then Job will curse God to his face. But as we read in Job 2:10, Job did not curse God when he was suddenly afflicted with a satanic illness which affected his skin, nor did Job accuse God of wrong doing. Instead, Job rebuked his wife when she told him to give up his integrity—in doing so, implying that Job has some secret sin which led to the calamity—and that Job curse God and die. Talk about adding insult to injury! What is worse, Job's wife is speaking forth the Devil's desire that Job would curse God to his face.

Here sits the greatest man of the east, a solitary outcast, alone on the town dunghill, in great agony, trying to relieve his suffering by using broken pieces of pottery to scratch his inflamed skin. Job is a pitiful sight and his suffering now extends to every area of his existence. Job has lost everything. Job is sick and suffering horrible pain. He is an outcast. Given sinful human nature, Job knows what everyone who sees him is thinking. What did Job do to deserve the fate which has befallen him? What horrible sin has Job committed? What has Job done to provoke God's anger? The stares from the self-righteous no doubt hurt every bit as much as did the sores on his skin.

With the reason why God has allowed Satan to subject Job to such an ordeal revealed to us in the prologue, the story of Job now moves to a rapid-fire dialogue where the intense and personal nature of Job's inward struggle moves to the fore. In Job 3, we see that this blameless and upright man is not a man of stone or clay. Job's pain is real. His lament breaks our hearts. In this chapter Job comes as close as he ever will to cursing God. But he never does, as Satan predicted that Job would. Job's heart breaks. He cries out in pain. He curses the day of his birth. But he refuses to curse God.

**B**efore we take up Job's complaint in Job 3, we are introduced to Job's three friends in verses 11-13 of Job 2.

As we saw last time, there was a reason why Satan did not kill Job's wife, when he took the lives of Job's

seven sons and three daughters. This is because Satan used Mrs. Job in the same way in which he had used Eve in Eden—to vocalize the very thing Satan had hoped to bring to pass, that Job would curse God to his face. The same thing holds true of Job’s three friends, who respond to their friend’s predicament with every intention of comforting Job in his suffering, but who, whether they know it or not, are actually doing the devil’s bidding. It is their very presence in the city of Uz, which plunges Job into greater depths of despair than we have previously witnessed. With the arrival of these three “wise men,” Job descends from a state of physical torment into a state of spiritual torment and lament, as we see in Job 3.

According to Job 2:11, “*When Job’s three friends, Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Naamathite, heard about all the troubles that had come upon him, they set out from their homes and met together by agreement to go and sympathize with him and comfort him.*” The fact that Job’s three friends had to travel from their homes clearly indicates that several months had transpired (cf. Job 7:3) between the time of Job’s loss of everything and the speeches which begin in Job 3. Some months earlier, when Job’s wife told him to admit that he had sinned and then to curse God and die, Job’s response was resolute. “*Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?*”

But the greatest enemy of the sufferer is the passage of time. As the hours turn into days, and days into months, the pain, the loss of sleep, the loss of emotional well-being, slowly but surely chip away at both Job’s physical endurance and spiritual resolve. And so Job’s three friends find him in a far different emotional state than he had been in just months earlier. In the midst of his tears, Job praised God. Now, after some months have transpired, Job has fallen into the depths of despair. So much so that he is to the point where he is now cursing the day of his birth.

The extent to which Job’s physical and emotional state has worsened becomes clear in verse 12. “*When they saw [Job] from a distance, they could hardly recognize him; they began to weep aloud, and they tore their robes and sprinkled dust on their heads.*” The greatest man of the east is now a pitiful wretch almost beyond recognition. Job’s three friends are totally unprepared for the sight that greeted them. The weeping and throwing of dust in the air are not only gestures of grief on behalf of their friend, but also indicates the shocking nature of Job’s appearance.<sup>1</sup> That Job was as good as dead (presumed to die) is clear from what is described in verse 13. “*Then they sat on the ground with him for seven days and seven nights.*” The customary period of mourning is seven days. During this whole time, “*no one said a word to him, because they saw how great his suffering was.*” Joining Job on the dunghill and mourning with him is a sign of the strength of the friendship between the four men. From this act of support, we must take what follows in the three cycles of speeches—despite the tactlessness of their comments—to mean that the sincerity of these men and their love for Job cannot be questioned. They mean well. But they simply do not understand and the more they talk, the more they make things worse.

In the meantime, what has happened to Job’s great faith? The man who refused to blame God and renounce his integrity is now a shell of his former self. Surely the pain and misery of his affliction, the realization of the greatness of his loss, the lack of proper food and rest, the shame of being banished from town, as well as the awareness the townspeople surely think he has brought this on himself through some secret sin, are all clearly in view. But the trigger for the lament which follows appears to be the arrival of Job’s three friends. The very presence of these three men starts an internal dialogue which Job did not face before. While Job does not know of the satanically-orchestrated trial by ordeal, he does know that he has done nothing wrong. And we can reasonably assume that Job knew that his friends must be

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<sup>1</sup> Andersen, *Job*, p. 95.

thinking similar things to what his wife had been thinking—there was some secret sin which Job had committed which God was now punishing. Since Job has committed no such secret sin, there is only one explanation as to why these horrible things have come to pass. Either God has abandoned Job,<sup>2</sup> or else God has permitted these things to pass.<sup>3</sup> And this raises the series of questions that pour forth from Job's heart throughout this entire chapter. "Why?"

What follows in chapter three raises the difficult question about whether or not Job sins by engaging in the lament which follows and the cursing of his own birth. The one thing we can say for sure is that the more intensely Job seeks an answer to his question, the more and more he realizes that there is a wall between man's understanding and God's decree which no amount of human wisdom or curiosity can penetrate. By focusing so intently upon the "why?" Job begins to lose the proper perspective he had earlier. While Job never curses God—and in no sense whatsoever fulfills Satan's expectation that Job will do so—cursing the day of his own birth does bring into question the righteousness of God's decree which included Job's birth. This explains why the story of Job ends with the account of Job's repentance (42:6) and after Job does so, God renews and re-establishes his relationship with Job, so that things are even better than they had been before (42:12 ff).<sup>4</sup>

We also need to keep in mind that at the end of these series of speeches, God commends Job for speaking correctly about him, while at the same time rebuking Job's friends for misrepresenting the ways of the Lord. As one writer reminds us, Job's friends are talking about God and at times Job addresses their theologically-flawed comments. But at many points in what follows, Job does not even respond to the comments of his friends, choosing instead to describe his own struggles by pouring out his heart before God. Job is not seeking to win an argument. Being right doesn't really matter to him. More importantly, Job seeks to restore his friendship with God. This is why Job's heartfelt but audacious comments shock his friends. They don't want to hear such honest if shocking words from Job, since they are primarily concerned only with the logic of it all. But Job not only responds to his friends, he tries to debate with God and force an answer to his question. Job is not always right, but he is painfully honest.<sup>5</sup> Job puts into words those things that every sufferer thinks and feels, but may be afraid to say out loud. This is why the honest and intense drama of all of this grabs us so tightly.

Despite the depths of his pain and the passion which flows from his heart, Job never laments the loss of his wealth or his health. Job does not whine about all the things he had before and has now lost. Instead, as a blameless and upright man, Job demands an answer from God. He repeatedly asks "why?" Since Job knows nothing of the reason behind his trial by ordeal, he is deeply troubled about the fact that God has brought all this to pass. Job has no clue yet that his obedience and refusal to curse God points us ahead to the perfect righteousness of Christ. Job is afraid that God has abandoned him, especially when he has done nothing wrong. Job struggles to figure out why this has happened. Anyone who has ever suffered can certainly put themselves in Job's place. We all ask "why?" Asking "why?" is not necessarily a sin. At least it is not a sin to ask "why?" if we are prepared to accept the answer God gives.

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<sup>2</sup> Kline, "Job," p. 464.

<sup>3</sup> Andersen, Job, p. 99.

<sup>4</sup> Kline, "Job," p. 465

<sup>5</sup> Cf. the helpful discussion of this in; Andersen, Job, pp. 96-99.

Does Job sin in all of this? Yes, because everything not done from faith is sin. But Job is already justified through the merits of the coming redeemer in whom he has placed his trust. Therefore, whatever sin Job commits must be seen in the context of the sins of a justified sinner. Job's repentance at the end of the story is clearly evidence that this is the case. Even though Job cries out in bewilderment, he never does curse God and fulfill Satan's prophecy. In this sense, Job passes the trial by ordeal with flying colors. His unwillingness to blame God means he understands the nature of God's promise—that God will redeem Job from his sin. Job also demands that God keep his promise to vindicate the innocent. Since all covenants involve two parties—and God has sworn on his oath that he will bless those who bless him and curse those who curse him—Job has every right to ask (even demand) that God vindicate him from the accusations that some secret sin lies at the root of Job's travail.

Yes, Job knows and accepts the fact that God has the right to do what he wants with his creatures. Yet Job also knows that God will not punish the innocent. Since he is blameless and upright, Job has the right to raise the "why?" question about his own predicament. The answer Job gets in the end can only satisfy those who are willing to understand God's mysterious ways through the eyes of faith. God's answer to Job as to why all this happened will never satisfy those driven by impatient and sinful human curiosity to ask "why?" But for those who see the trials of life in the light of the sufferings of Jesus Christ, there is indeed an answer to the very difficult questions that Job raises throughout his lament.

**I**n the first ten verses of Job 3, we learn that Satan's challenge fails. Job does not curse God—instead he curses the day of his birth.

Job's doxology now gives way to lament. The memory of wealth and joy have now faded, stolen by Job's current misery. The presence of his friends mourning his wretched condition brings forth a torrent of heartfelt but provocative words. Thus we read in verse 1, "*After this,*" [the arrival of his friends and the week of mourning] "*Job opened his mouth and cursed the day of his birth. He said: 'May the day of my birth perish, and the night it was said, 'A boy is born!'*" What Job is requesting is that the Lord remove that day from history when he was conceived. Job cries out in verses 4-7, "*that day-may it turn to darkness; may God above not care about it; may no light shine upon it. May darkness and deep shadow claim it once more; may a cloud settle over it; may blackness overwhelm its light. That night-may thick darkness seize it; may it not be included among the days of the year nor be entered in any of the months. May that night be barren; may no shout of joy be heard in it.*" All of this can be paraphrased by saying, "it would have been better if I had never been born."

The saddest part of Job's ordeal is that his present pain has totally obscured the memories of all the joys he had known before. When life is viewed through the lens of pain and loss, it is easy to reason, "better to have never existed at all than to endure my present sufferings." Some of us have been there. Some of us are there now.

A number of commentators take what follows in verse 8 to be indicative of the depths of Job's despair. Job invokes magicians to blot out the day of his birth even as they seek to control the monsters of the deep.<sup>6</sup> "*May those who curse days curse that day, those who are ready to rouse Leviathan.*" But this does not fit with Job's fear of the living God, and there is every possibility (as the NIV text note indicates) that this is really the word *ym* or "sea." The idea is that the powers which hold destructive

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<sup>6</sup> John E. Hartley, The Book of Job, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1988), p. 94.

forces in check (preventing the chaos signified by Leviathan), now be used to blot out the day of Job's birth.<sup>7</sup> Job's wish is that the night on which he was conceived be blotted out of the historical record, as we read in verses 9-10. *"May its morning stars become dark; may it wait for daylight in vain and not see the first rays of dawn, for it did not shut the doors of the womb on me to hide trouble from my eyes."* Job does not seek to take his life. Suicide is not an option. But given his current state, Job wishes that he had never been born. Cursed be the day of his birth! Job's patience has become despondency.

**A**t this point in his lament, Job's cursing the day of his birth gives way to a series of rhetorical questions. "Why?"

Since God had not blotted out the day of his birth, why then was Job even born? Job's despair begins to become apparent beginning in verse 11. *"Why did I not perish at birth, and die as I came from the womb? Why were there knees to receive me and breasts that I might be nursed?"* But Job was born. Thus, he reasons, "would it not be better to just die and get it over with?" As he states in verses 13-16, *"For now I would be lying down in peace; I would be asleep and at rest with kings and counselors of the earth, who built for themselves places now lying in ruins, with rulers who had gold, who filled their houses with silver. Or why was I not hidden in the ground like a stillborn child, like an infant who never saw the light of day?"* As Meredith Kline puts it, "even confinement in the dark grave—not yet illumined by the resurrection glory of Christ—seemed a far better state of existence. There Job, outcast and a byword of base men and fools would share a common lot with kings and princes."<sup>8</sup>

In the grave there are no stares from the self-righteous. There are no haunting thoughts, no wretched existence. No pain and itching from sores. As Job puts it in verse 17, *"There [in sheol] the wicked cease from turmoil, and there the weary are at rest. Captives also enjoy their ease; they no longer hear the slave driver's shout. The small and the great are there, and the slave is freed from his master."* Better to be dead, Job reasons, than continue on with such suffering and shame. Job does not speak of an afterlife as a place of reward or of curse, although he certainly does believe in a bodily resurrection at the end of the age (cf. Job 19:25). Keep in mind that at this point in redemptive history, not much about the resurrection or the afterlife has been revealed. The point being made here is that for Job, death will bring an end to his sufferings. Job will not take his own life. He hopes that God will take it for him and bring an end to his travail. We could even paraphrase Job to be saying, "just kill me and get it over with!" But this is not God's purpose for Job.

**A**s Job's lament continues, and it is clear that he cannot either undo the fact of his birth, nor bring his own life to an end, Job now arrives at the fundamental question in verses 20-23.

Job cries out, *"Why is light given to those in misery, and life to the bitter of soul, to those who long for death that does not come, who search for it more than for hidden treasure, who are filled with gladness and rejoice when they reach the grave? Why is life given to a man whose way is hidden, whom God has hedged in?"* In other words, why does God give such good things like life to those who now wish to die. And why does God not give death to those who want it? If God gives good gifts and death would end Job's suffering, why does he not give Job the gift of death so that his suffering might come to an end?

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<sup>7</sup> Andersen, *Job*, p. 104.

<sup>8</sup> Kline, "Job," p. 465.

It is important to notice the word play in the text. Satan saw the hedge or the limits placed around Job as a sign of God's favor. Without awareness of Satan's appearance before the heavenly court, Job now uses the same word to describe how he feels trapped—hemmed in by God's goodness in light of his own suffering.<sup>9</sup> God's prior blessing has become a matter of curse.

While the final three verses of the Hebrew text of Job 3 are difficult to translate, what is clearly revealed here are the depths of Job's anguish. Beginning in verse 24, Job cries out, "*For sighing comes to me instead of food; my groans pour out like water. What I feared has come upon me; what I dreaded has happened to me. I have no peace, no quietness; I have no rest, but only turmoil.*" The words translated in the NIV as sighing and groaning are far too weak. The former word describes the roaring of lions, while the latter can be used in reference to the crash of ocean waves.<sup>10</sup> This is much more than a mere sigh of resignation or a soft groan. This is a violent and defiant act, something like "bellowing."

We also learn that Job did not take his great wealth for granted. He regularly made burnt offerings to the Lord not only to give thanks for all that God gave him, but also to consecrate all of his possessions to the Lord who gave them. The very thing Job dreads most has come to pass. The loss of his wealth means the loss of God's favor. Thus Job is terrified by the thought that God no longer favors to him and Job has no idea why.<sup>11</sup> He has done nothing wrong. He is blameless, upright, fears God and shuns evil. Why has his life come to this? "*I have no peace, no quietness; I have no rest, but only turmoil.*" The greatest man of the east is completely undone. And our hearts break for him.

**W**hat should we say in response to such suffering?

First, Job is correct not to curse God or blame God for what has happened to him. By resisting the temptation to do so, Job passes the trial by ordeal and frustrates the purposes of Satan. Second, as a prophet, Job's own obedience points us ahead to the perfect obedience of Jesus Christ, which is the ground of Job's own justified status before God. Third, in all of this, Job is an example to us in our own suffering. It is perfectly OK to pour out our hearts before God, as though we could hide what we are thinking from God anyway. But what Job does that we cannot do is curse the day of our birth. God has ordained the number of our days as well as whether or not we will suffer. If we accept good things from his hand, should we not, like Job, be willing to accept suffering and loss when God brings these things to pass? After all, God has ordained whatsoever comes to pass—good and evil.

The thing to keep in mind here is that we know what Job does not. We know how the story will end. We know that God is going to restore Job's family and fortune and vindicate Job's good name after he passes through the ordeal. Even though Job does not know nor understand the true nature of his trial, we do. Therefore, we have a perspective on Job's ordeal that he does not have. Like Job we know that God not only promises to turn evil and suffering into good, but he has the power to do the very thing he has promised to do. Unlike Job, we have seen that the promised redeemer whom Job anticipates, has indeed come and fulfilled all righteousness. Given our better redemptive-historical perspective on things, we know that Jesus Christ suffered and died for our sins upon the cross. And like the poor sufferer Job,

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<sup>9</sup> Cf. Kline, "Job," p. 465; and Andersen, *Job*, p. 109.

<sup>10</sup> Andersen, *Job*, p. 109.

<sup>11</sup> Andersen, *Job*, p. 110.

Jesus, too, was innocent. Like Job, Jesus, too, cried out in anguish and asked that haunting question, “why?” Thus words of Matthew 27:45-46 echo the words of Job, “*From the sixth hour until the ninth hour darkness came over all the land. About the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, ‘Eloi, Eloi lama sabachthani?’—which means, ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’*”

This means that Jesus sanctifies the question “why?” Since Jesus asked “why?” so may we. What is more, the one who hears and answers our prayers is a fellow sufferer, who was tempted and tested in all ways as we have been and yet was without sin. But we must also understand that Jesus accepted God’s answer to his question. Jesus must suffer and die so that we might be saved from our sins. The suffering and agony of the cross must come before the empty tomb. This is the pattern we find throughout redemptive-history. So while we may ask “why?” we must be willing to accept the answer. Suffering comes before glory.

That being said, we must also never forget that the victory of the resurrection did come as Christ’s death became a glorious victory over the curse and the devil. When we look at the big picture, not only do we see that God restores Job’s health, wealth and family, but he restores his relationship with Job. The same holds true for the greater Job, Jesus Christ. Even as Jesus suffered and cried out “why?” so, too, God raised him from the dead and gave him the name above every other name. As God has done for his beloved son, so too, God will turn our suffering to good. Our suffering will come to a glorious end and our suffering is never in vain. It has an ultimate purpose, even if that purpose is known only to God.

Therefore, in the midst of trial, loss and sickness, it is perfectly OK to open our hearts and cry out in anguish as did Job. But you must know before you ask “why?” that you may not get your answer until you cross over into glory. Suffering, loss and death most often precede the ultimate and final answer. But since all of God’s promises are “yes” and “amen” in Christ, even as we ask “why?” we can be sure that not only does our own suffering have a purpose, but that somehow, and in some way, God will turn it all into good.

How do we know this? We know this from the story of Job. But more importantly, we know this from Jesus Christ’s death and resurrection. Suffering comes before glory. But glory will come, just as it did for Job and for our blessed Lord Jesus. And it will come for all of you who even now have been called to suffer. Amen!

## “Though He Slay Me, Yet Will I Hope in Him”

*Texts: Job 4:1-14:22; Matthew 27:45-50*

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There is a reason why we use the phrase “Job’s Counselors” when we speak of people whose well-intended words only add insult to injury. Having spent a week in mourning with their friend Job, and having heard his lament in which he curses the day of his birth, Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar now seek to “comfort” their heartbroken friend. But they will utterly fail, as their misguided words only bring pain to Job. As they attempt to show Job the error of his ways, they instead provoke a defiant outburst of protest, the subject of this sermon.

We now turn to an extended dialogue/debate which runs from Job 4-14. In the first of three cycles of speeches we will hear from each of Job’s friends as well as from Job himself. Context is critical. In the prologue (chapters 1-2), we met Job, learned of his great piety as well as the critical fact that underlies what follows. Job’s trial by ordeal has come about because God directed Satan’s attention to Job, a man who was blameless and upright, who feared God and shunned evil. When Satan posed the idea that Job’s piety is self-serving, and that if all of the good things God had given him were taken away, Job will no longer worship God, but curse him, Job’s ordeal began in earnest. But when Job’s possessions are gone and when his children are killed, Job does not curse God. Instead, he praises God. Satan tries again. Only this time Satan wants to attack Job’s health. Take away Job’s health—Satan reasons—and Job will curse God to his face. Now afflicted with a horrible skin disease, still Job does not curse God. Job is an outcast, covered with sores, a miserable wretch, sitting on the town dunghill. He has lost everything. And all the people who saw him surely were thinking, “what sin did Job commit which brought down God’s wrath upon him?”

Having heard of the disaster that had befallen their friend, Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar set out from their homes to comfort their friend. Between the time Job lost everything and the time his three friends arrive, Job’s emotional state deteriorated greatly. He has reached the point where he curses the day of his own birth. In the lament of Job 3, Job repeatedly asks the question “why did all of these horrible things come to pass?” Yet, the trigger which sets Job off is the arrival of his three friends, who, out of their deep respect for Job, sat silently with him throughout a week of mourning. Knowing that his friends must be thinking that he must have committed some secret sin which brought about God’s judgment, Job knows that he has done nothing wrong. This is why Job’s inner turmoil is so great and the story so compelling.

As we turn to the dialogue which follows, we need to be aware that Job’s suffering is viewed from two completely different perspectives. From the fact of his suffering, Job’s friends all infer that Job has committed some great sin. In this, they are completely orthodox in their theology. They know that God is holy and must punish sin. In their minds, Job’s ordeal is evidence that Job is being punished. The conclusion is obvious. Job has sinned. But from Job’s perspective the issue is completely different. Since Job is innocent—despite the opinion of his friends—the fact that he is suffering calls into question God’s justice. How can God be just if he’s punishing the innocent?<sup>1</sup> This dilemma explains why Job is

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<sup>1</sup> Andersen, *Job*, p. 112.

not focused on the loss of his possessions and family, nearly as much as he is focused upon the loss of his relationship with God. How can God treat Job like an enemy when Job has done nothing wrong?

Job's lament (Job 3) ends the silence of the period of mourning and provokes the three cycles of speeches from his three friends, to which Job responds. The three opening speeches (cycle one) are the longest and most carefully reasoned. The second cycle of speeches in Job 15-21 are somewhat shorter, while the third cycle of speeches in Job 22-26 are the shortest and most intense. As the debates and speeches become more heated, the four men seem to run out of steam.<sup>2</sup> The dialogue begins with Job's three friends offering him pastoral advice, but the speeches quickly take on the air of a courtroom drama, as though Job were on trial and his friends take on the role of a council of elders who pass judgment on Job. Job refuses to agree with their verdict.<sup>3</sup> Yet his friends will not budge from their view that God is holy and must punish all sin. Therefore, Job's plight is indicative that he has sinned.

In cycle one—round one—we have the speech from Eliphaz the Temanite and Job's response.

Eliphaz is the oldest of Job's three friends and is given the opportunity to speak first in all three cycles of speeches. The presumption is that as the oldest, he is also the wisest. Initially, Eliphaz presents what appears to be the orthodox view of sin—righteous behavior brings forth blessing and sinful behavior brings curse. But Eliphaz also believes that there is a direct connection between the degree of someone's sin and the amount of suffering they must endure.<sup>4</sup> This can be seen in Job 4:1-4, as the dialogue begins: *"Then Eliphaz the Temanite replied: 'If someone ventures a word with you, will you be impatient? But who can keep from speaking? Think how you have instructed many, how you have strengthened feeble hands. Your words have supported those who stumbled; you have strengthened faltering knees.'*" Having heard Job's lament, Eliphaz cannot keep his opinion to himself. Beginning with a reference to Job's esteemed reputation, Eliphaz insinuates that Job does not practice the things he has taught others.

Then, in verses 5-9, Eliphaz contends that Job's troubles are the result of some secret sin. *"But now trouble comes to you, and you are discouraged; it strikes you, and you are dismayed. Should not your piety be your confidence and your blameless ways your hope? Consider now: Who, being innocent, has ever perished? Where were the upright ever destroyed? As I have observed, those who plow evil and those who sow trouble reap it. At the breath of God they are destroyed; at the blast of his anger they perish."* From Eliphaz's perspective, there can only be one reason why Job is suffering. Suffering is the consequence of sin. Those who plow evil will reap the reward. The implication is inescapable. Job must have sown evil, or else he would not be suffering. But if anything, this shows us the folly of trying to understand the ways of God and the sufferings of others through the lens of our own limited observations of the world around us. Without knowledge of the decision of the heavenly court, Eliphaz will never understand Job's situation. Therefore Eliphaz's advice to Job is utterly self-centered.

Eliphaz even claims his observation is confirmed through a dream. In Job 4:12-15, we read of what one

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<sup>2</sup> David Atkinson, *The Message of Job* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1991, p. 39.

<sup>3</sup> Kline, "Job," p. 465.

<sup>4</sup> Kline, "Job," p. 465.

writer calls a very spooky atmosphere.<sup>5</sup> “A word was secretly brought to me, my ears caught a whisper of it. Amid disquieting dreams in the night, when deep sleep falls on men, fear and trembling seized me and made all my bones shake. A spirit glided past my face, and the hair on my body stood on end.”

Eliphaz’s experience tells him that sowing to evil brings calamity. Now he appeals to special revelation. From Eliphaz’s distorted perspective, Job’s lament called into question God’s providence, when instead, Job ought to be looking at his own conduct for an explanation. But Job never questioned God’s conduct. Rather, Job laments his own miserable condition, wishing he were dead. Two different things.

In Job 5:1, Eliphaz offers Job a solution to his problem. Job must repent of his sins. Says Eliphaz, “*Call if you will, but who will answer you?*” The implication is that Job’s lament is not heard, because he has not repented. But Eliphaz is not done. “*To which of the holy ones will you turn?*” Since Job is in sin, he cannot count on the help of divine messengers. As the dialogue unfolds and Job begins to defend himself, ever so slowly Job begins to raise the idea of a mediator (or a go between), who will make peace with God on his behalf. Job never envisioned that God would take to himself a true human nature in the person of Jesus Christ, who is the only true mediator between God and man.<sup>6</sup> But such a mediator is God’s answer to the question of the suffering of the righteous and the anguish that we all feel in the midst of suffering. Jesus Christ, the only mediator, is not only truly God, but also the man of sorrows.

In Job 5:9-16, Eliphaz gives us an eloquent expression of God’s providence. “[God] *performs wonders that cannot be fathomed, miracles that cannot be counted. He bestows rain on the earth; he sends water upon the countryside. The lowly he sets on high, and those who mourn are lifted to safety. He thwarts the plans of the crafty, so that their hands achieve no success. He catches the wise in their craftiness, and the schemes of the wily are swept away. Darkness comes upon them in the daytime; at noon they grope as in the night. He saves the needy from the sword in their mouth; he saves them from the clutches of the powerful. So the poor have hope, and injustice shuts its mouth.*” Eliphaz’s faulty understanding of Job’s situation and his condescending attitude make it difficult for Job to accept these wonderful words. In what follows Eliphaz leaves no purpose for suffering of the righteous, other than to see it as the just desserts of sowing to evil.<sup>7</sup> Eliphaz echoes the unbiblical theology typical of many Pentecostal faith-healers. Do the right thing, say the right words, and everything will be fine! And if you are not healed, who is at fault? You are. You must have some unconfessed sin in your life. So must Job.

As Eliphaz concludes his soliloquy, he exhorts the suffering Job to repent and submit to God. Once chastened, God will restore him. Listen to the words of Eliphaz from Job 5:17-25, and put yourself in Job’s place. How would these words sound to you in the midst of suffering? “*Blessed is the man whom God corrects; so do not despise the discipline of the Almighty. For he wounds, but he also binds up; he injures, but his hands also heal. From six calamities he will rescue you; in seven no harm will befall you. In famine he will ransom you from death, and in battle from the stroke of the sword. You will be protected from the lash of the tongue, and need not fear when destruction comes. You will laugh at destruction and famine, and need not fear the beasts of the earth. . . . You will know that your children will be many, and your descendants like the grass of the earth. You will come to the grave in full vigor, like sheaves gathered in season.*” Eliphaz concludes by saying to Job, “*We have examined this, and it is*

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<sup>5</sup> Andersen, *Job*, p. 113.

<sup>6</sup> Andersen, *Job*, p. 117.

<sup>7</sup> Kline, “Job,” p. 465.

*true. So hear it and apply it to yourself.*” In other words, take your lumps and God will restore you.

The problem is not so much with Eliphaz’s theology, but his ineptness as a counselor.<sup>8</sup> A sufferer does not need to be told to take his suffering like a man, any more than someone who has lost an unbelieving relative needs to hear a lecture on reprobation. “Pull yourself together” does not comfort someone in the midst of a trial, grief or despair. Such advice is actually cruel. While Eliphaz’s logic is impeccable, he has limited God’s purposes in suffering to the principle that everything you reap comes from what you have sown. But this is manifestly untrue of Job.<sup>9</sup> Job has not sown evil. Job has already confessed that God can send both evil and good. Job knows that God can do whatever he wishes. Job may very well agree with Eliphaz’s speech and its focus on God’s power and justice. The problem is that this is not the issue. Given Eliphaz’s limited perspective and his Pentecostal claim to divine revelation (“God told me this was true”) he misses the mark widely. Eliphaz’s words reflect an astounding self-righteousness.

Since the situation Eliphaz describes does not apply to Job, the last thing Job needs from Eliphaz is a lecture to the effect that if Job would only do what Eliphaz tells him to do and repent of his sin, everything will be OK. The reader already knows what Eliphaz does not and what Job is starting to grasp. Job’s tragic state is not the result of divine judgment for past sin. God may indeed have a purpose for Job’s ordeal—a purpose which completely transcends Eliphaz’s preconceived notions about what God can or cannot do. No trite speech about sowing and reaping can comfort Job after what he’s endured. Job is still be groping for an answer, but he knows Eliphaz does not have one!<sup>10</sup>

Job cannot take anymore. And so in 6:1-7:2, he responds to his friend. Eliphaz’s words do not bring Job comfort. Instead, they bring forth an emotional outburst and protest from Job against the insinuation that there is some hidden sin in his life which has caused God to punish him. Knowing he has done nothing wrong, Job’s reaction is to cry out in terror because he feels like God has become his enemy. In Job 6:2-4 we hear haunting words from Job. *“If only my anguish could be weighed and all my misery be placed on the scales! It would surely outweigh the sand of the seas—no wonder my words have been impetuous. The arrows of the Almighty are in me, my spirit drinks in their poison; God’s terrors are marshaled against me.”* The Hebrew text speaks of the armaments of God in a battle array against him.<sup>11</sup> The thought of God bringing an army against Job brings terror to his heart.

In 6:14, Job speaks directly to his counselor. *“A despairing man should have the devotion of his friends, even though he forsakes the fear of the Almighty. But my brothers are as undependable as intermittent streams, as the streams that overflow when darkened by thawing ice and swollen with melting snow, but that cease to flow in the dry season, and in the heat vanish from their channels.”* Job will not let this go—he will defend himself. As he points out in 6:25 and following, *“How painful are honest words! But what do your arguments prove? Do you mean to correct what I say, and treat the words of a despairing man as wind? You would even cast lots for the fatherless and barter away your friend. `But now be so kind as to look at me. Would I lie to your face? Relent, do not be unjust;*

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<sup>8</sup> Andersen, *Job*, p. 123.

<sup>9</sup> Atkinson, *The Message of Job*, p. 43.

<sup>10</sup> See the helpful discussion in Andersen, *Job*, pp. 123-126.

<sup>11</sup> Andersen, *Job*, p. 128.

*reconsider, for my integrity is at stake. Is there any wickedness on my lips? Can my mouth not discern malice?"* Job has done nothing wrong. He has not spoken evil, nor done evil. He now tells Eliphaz to relent and back off. Job's integrity is at stake.

In Job 7, the sufferer speaks directly to the Almighty. His friends have no answer and do not understand his plight. Thus it is only natural for Job to look anew to his creator, friend and redeemer for an answer. Job cries out in verses 1 and following, *"Does not man have hard service on earth? Are not his days like those of a hired man? Like a slave longing for the evening shadows, or a hired man waiting eagerly for his wages, so I have been allotted months of futility, and nights of misery have been assigned to me. When I lie down I think, 'How long before I get up?' The night drags on, and I toss till dawn. My body is clothed with worms and scabs, my skin is broken and festering."*

Knowing he has done nothing wrong, Job cries out for an answer. In Job 7:11 we read: *"Therefore I will not keep silent; I will speak out in the anguish of my spirit, I will complain in the bitterness of my soul."* As Francis Andersen reminds us, "Job makes his way to God with prayers that are sobs. Narrow and inhuman is the religion that bans weeping from the vocabulary of prayer."<sup>12</sup> And Job returns to this theme again in verses 19-23. *"Will you never look away from me, or let me alone even for an instant? If I have sinned, what have I done to you, O watcher of men? Why have you made me your target? Have I become a burden to you? Why do you not pardon my offenses and forgive my sins? For I will soon lie down in the dust; you will search for me, but I will be no more."* Job wants to know "why?" He knows that there is no secret sin. Job wants to know what we already know—that there is a purpose behind all of this and Job's suffering does not have to do with some secret sin or a divine vendetta against him. Job knows he is a sinner. What troubles him is that it appears as though he has not been forgiven.<sup>13</sup>

This brings us to cycle one, round two, and the speech from Bildad and Job's response.

**T** Bildad picks up where Eliphaz left off. Utterly insensitive to Job's lament and his defense against Eliphaz's accusation, Bildad doggedly returns to the theme of divine justice, even calling Job a windbag in Job 8:2:<sup>14</sup> *"How long will you say such things? Your words are a blustering wind."* For Bildad the issue is very straight-forward. There are two kinds of people—those who are blameless and those who are wicked. God reveals who is who through blessing or curse. And so in verses 3-7, Bildad makes his case, only instead of accusing Job of a secret sin, he accuses Job's children of sinning. *"Does God pervert justice? Does the Almighty pervert what is right? When your children sinned against him, he gave them over to the penalty of their sin. But if you will look to God and plead with the Almighty, if you are pure and upright, even now he will rouse himself on your behalf and restore you to your rightful place. Your beginnings will seem humble, so prosperous will your future be."* These words must have cut Job to the quick, since he regularly made burnt offerings on behalf of his children. Bildad's words are not only cruel, they are dead wrong. Notice how his speech ends. Job's own illness has not yet proved fatal, so he still has time to repent and plead with God to spare his life.

Perhaps aware of the stinging nature of his words, Bildad offers a rather weak attempt in 8:20-22 to offer

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<sup>12</sup> Andersen, *Job*, p. 136.

<sup>13</sup> Andersen, *Job*, p. 139.

<sup>14</sup> Andersen, *Job*, p. 140.

Job words of cheer, but these words bite as well. *“Surely God does not reject a blameless man or strengthen the hands of evildoers. He will yet fill your mouth with laughter and your lips with shouts of joy. Your enemies will be clothed in shame, and the tents of the wicked will be no more.”* The problem is that God does not reject the blameless, yet God has apparently rejected Job. Therefore, Job must not be blameless. Again, the implication is obvious. Job must repent of whatever sin he has committed!

Despite his lowly state, Job cannot let these heartless words go without a response. In chapter 9, Job addresses Bildad directly, while in chapter 10, Job pours out his heart before God. As the dialogue with his friends now takes on the shape of a courtroom drama, Job endorses his friend’s main theme—that God is just—before responding to the application of Bildad’s argument. For Job, even God seems like a prosecutor. Thus in 9:2, Job agrees with the essence of Bildad’s speech before lamenting the futility of trying to argue his case before God. *“Indeed, I know that this is true. But how can a mortal be righteous before God?”* There is no way for a sinful creature to win an argument with God. Job puts it this way beginning in 9:3: *“Though one wished to dispute with him, he could not answer him one time out of a thousand. His wisdom is profound, his power is vast. Who has resisted him and come out unscathed? He moves mountains without their knowing it and overturns them in his anger. He shakes the earth from its place and makes its pillars tremble. He speaks to the sun and it does not shine; he seals off the light of the stars. He alone stretches out the heavens and treads on the waves of the sea. He is the Maker of the Bear and Orion, the Pleiades and the constellations of the south. He performs wonders that cannot be fathomed, miracles that cannot be counted. When he passes me, I cannot see him; when he goes by, I cannot perceive him. If he snatches away, who can stop him? Who can say to him, ‘What are you doing?’”* Job knows that God does whatsoever pleases him. Job can do nothing to stay his hand.

Beginning in 9:25, Job describes his situation as a sign of God’s condemnation. *“My days are swifter than a runner; they fly away without a glimpse of joy. They skim past like boats of papyrus, like eagles swooping down on their prey. If I say, ‘I will forget my complaint, I will change my expression, and smile,’ I still dread all my sufferings, for I know you will not hold me innocent. Since I am already found guilty, why should I struggle in vain? Even if I washed myself with soap and my hands with washing soda, you would plunge me into a slime pit so that even my clothes would detest me. He is not a man like me that I might answer him, that we might confront each other in court. If only there were someone to arbitrate between us, to lay his hand upon us both, someone to remove God’s rod from me, so that his terror would frighten me no more. Then I would speak up without fear of him, but as it now stands with me, I cannot.”* Even if he does as Bildad suggests, and repents, Job knows that he cannot stop God’s will. What Job needs is a mediator, someone to arbitrate his case before the holy God. What Job needs is the intercession of Jesus Christ—something he already has but does not yet understand.

In Job 10:1-7, without breaking stride, Job turns from debate to prayer, demanding a hearing before the heavenly court. *“I loathe my very life; therefore I will give free rein to my complaint and speak out in the bitterness of my soul. I will say to God: Do not condemn me, but tell me what charges you have against me. Does it please you to oppress me, to spurn the work of your hands, while you smile on the schemes of the wicked? Do you have eyes of flesh? Do you see as a mortal sees? Are your days like those of a mortal or your years like those of a man, that you must search out my faults and probe after my sin—though you know that I am not guilty and that no one can rescue me from your hand?”* In verses 14-17, Job cries out, *“If I sinned, you would be watching me and would not let my offense go unpunished. If I am guilty—woe to me! Even if I am innocent, I cannot lift my head, for I am full of shame and drowned in my affliction. If I hold my head high, you stalk me like a lion and again display your awesome power against me. You bring new witnesses against me and increase your anger toward me; your forces come against me wave upon wave.”*

If God is indeed good and all powerful, then why have things turned out like they have? Job comes to the essence of his ordeal in 10:18-22: *“Why then did you bring me out of the womb? I wish I had died before any eye saw me. If only I had never come into being, or had been carried straight from the womb to the grave! Are not my few days almost over? Turn away from me so I can have a moment's joy before I go to the place of no return, to the land of gloom and deep shadow, to the land of deepest night, of deep shadow and disorder, where even the light is like darkness.”* Even as Job hits the deepest depths of despair, still he cries out to God for deliverance.

**T**his, then, brings us to cycle one—round three, the speech from Zophar the Naamathite and Job’s response to the most difficult words yet.

Job’s response to Eliphaz and Bildad was to protest their charges and proclaim his innocence. Zophar has been listening to all of this and now applies the principle of divine justice with a vengeance in verses 1-6 of Job 11. *“Then Zophar the Naamathite replied: ‘Are all these words to go unanswered? Is this talker to be vindicated? Will your idle talk reduce men to silence? Will no one rebuke you when you mock? You say to God, ‘My beliefs are flawless and I am pure in your sight.’ Oh, how I wish that God would speak, that he would open his lips against you and disclose to you the secrets of wisdom, for true wisdom has two sides. Know this: God has even forgotten some of your sin.”* In Zophar’s estimation, Job refuses to see the obvious. Even if Job were granted what he requests—an open debate with God—God’s justice would consume him immediately.<sup>15</sup> Job is an exaggerator and an impatient man. But Zophar has missed Job’s point and now mocks his friend. What Zophar cannot grasp is that Job is bewildered. His outbursts are not self-justification, but a heart-felt lament. But then Zophar’s theory of divine justice allows no room whatsoever for the sincere heartfelt lament of a sufferer like Job.<sup>16</sup>

Zophar’s logic now gives way to a series of self-righteous opinions. According to Zophar, all Job needs to do is to get his act together, repent of his sin, and then God will restore him. In verses 13-20 we read: *“Yet if you devote your heart to him and stretch out your hands to him, if you put away the sin that is in your hand and allow no evil to dwell in your tent, then you will lift up your face without shame; you will stand firm and without fear. You will surely forget your trouble, recalling it only as waters gone by. Life will be brighter than noonday, and darkness will become like morning. You will be secure, because there is hope; you will look about you and take your rest in safety. You will lie down, with no one to make you afraid, and many will court your favor. But the eyes of the wicked will fail, and escape will elude them; their hope will become a dying gasp.”*

Job’s friends have had their say. Job is suffering. Therefore Job must have sinned. His horrible plight is simply the fruit of divine justice. Yet, despite the self-righteous lectures, Job has not budged one bit. He will not confess sins he has not committed. He submits to the will and power of God, but Job cannot understand why God would put him through all of this, since he has done nothing wrong. He demands a trial—even though he knows God can bring an overwhelming case against him. And so in chapters 12-14, we find one of the longest speeches in the book as Job not only dismisses the arrogant criticism of his friends, but as he responds to Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar, we begin to see a glimmer of hope and a longing for a mediator who will stand between himself and God so as to make peace.

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<sup>15</sup> Kline, “Job,” p. 471.

<sup>16</sup> Andersen, *Job*, p. 156

In chapter 12:2-6, Job responds to his friends with scorn. *“Doubtless you are the people, and wisdom will die with you! But I have a mind as well as you; I am not inferior to you. Who does not know all these things? `I have become a laughingstock to my friends, though I called upon God and he answered- a mere laughingstock, though righteous and blameless! Men at ease have contempt for misfortune as the fate of those whose feet are slipping. The tents of marauders are undisturbed, and those who provoke God are secure- those who carry their god in their hands.”* The theories of Job’s friends cannot explain the reality of his situation. They reduce God to someone they can control.

But from Job 12:13 ff, it is clear to Job that God cannot be managed. *“To God belong wisdom and power; counsel and understanding are his. What he tears down cannot be rebuilt; the man he imprisons cannot be released. If he holds back the waters, there is drought; if he lets them loose, they devastate the land. To him belong strength and victory; both deceived and deceiver are his. He leads counselors away stripped and makes fools of judges. He takes off the shackles put on by kings and ties a loincloth around their waist. He leads priests away stripped and overthrows men long established. He silences the lips of trusted advisers and takes away the discernment of elders.”* His friends do not understand.

Job is not finished. In Job 13:13-19 Job utters what amounts to a confession of faith, *“Keep silent and let me speak; then let come to me what may. Why do I put myself in jeopardy and take my life in my hands? Though he slay me, yet will I hope in him; I will surely defend my ways to his face. Indeed, this will turn out for my deliverance, for no godless man would dare come before him! Listen carefully to my words; let your ears take in what I say. Now that I have prepared my case, I know I will be vindicated. Can anyone bring charges against me? If so, I will be silent and die.”* The corner has been turned. Job wants to speak in his defense. He will plead his case no matter what will come as a result. He knows that even if YHWH strikes him dead, he will be vindicated in the end.

With these words, Job points us ahead to Jesus Christ, who prayed a similar prayer in Gethsemane: *“My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. . . . He fell with his face to the ground and prayed, `My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will. . . .The spirit is willing, but the body is weak. My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done.”* Jesus knew that in dying, he too, would be vindicated. Jesus must drink the cup of wrath for salvation to come to God’s people. As the greater Job, Jesus is willing to be slain, knowing he would be vindicated in the end.

Having considered this great truth, Job returns to the theme of his sins. In 14:1, Job reminds us, *“man born of woman is of few days and full of trouble. He springs up like a flower and withers away; like a fleeting shadow, he does not endure. Do you fix your eye on such a one? Will you bring him before you for judgment? Who can bring what is pure from the impure? No one!”* Clearly, Job is aware of human sin and that no man can do anything to save himself. He continues in verses 5-6: *“Man’s days are determined; you have decreed the number of his months and have set limits he cannot exceed. So look away from him and let him alone, till he has put in his time like a hired man.”*

But hope is beginning to arise in Job’s heart. As we read in verse 13, *“if only you would hide me in the grave and conceal me till your anger has passed! If only you would set me a time and then remember me! If a man dies, will he live again? All the days of my hard service I will wait for my renewal to come. You will call and I will answer you; you will long for the creature your hands have made. Surely then you will count my steps but not keep track of my sin. My offenses will be sealed up in a bag; you will cover over my sin.”*

Sadly, Job's suffering once again erodes his hope. Again, he returns to a lament in verse 18: "*as a mountain erodes and crumbles and as a rock is moved from its place, as water wears away stones and torrents wash away the soil, so you destroy man's hope. You overpower him once for all, and he is gone; you change his countenance and send him away. If his sons are honored, he does not know it; if they are brought low, he does not see it. He feels but the pain of his own body and mourns only for himself.*" The dialogue between Job and his friends has two more rounds to go, before Elihu speaks, and then Job gets his answer from God himself from the midst of a whirlwind. But the light is starting to dawn. Job now seeks a mediator. And he knows he will be vindicated. Thus even now, the suffering Job is pointing us to such a mediator and vindicator, Jesus Christ. The resolution to his troubles may yet be at hand! Amen.

## “I Know That My Redeemer Lives”

*Texts: Job 15:1-21:34; Philippians 3:1-11*

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From the perspective of Job’s friends, the reason why Job lost all of his possessions, his children and his health is very simple. God is holy, therefore he must punish all sin. Since it is obvious that Job is being punished by God, there can only be one explanation. Either Job or his children have committed some horrible sin which has kindled the wrath of God. But Job knows he is innocent of such a sin. His heart is broken because he has no idea why God is subjecting him to such an ordeal. Even as he cries out to God, lamenting his sad state and asking “why?” Job knows that his friends have no clue as to why he is suffering. He knows their attempts to “comfort him” are cruel, self-righteous diatribes which have no basis in fact. As Job becomes increasingly defiant with his friends, they become increasingly frustrated and angry with Job, who, in their estimation, could easily remedy his situation, if only he’d see the light and repent of his sins. The dialogue between friends of Job in 4-14, now becomes a full-blown argument in Job 15-21.

We return to our series on Job and we pick up where we left off, as we turn to a second cycle of speeches between Job and his three friends. This second cycle (Job 15-21) includes speeches (datribes) from Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar, followed by responses from Job. As we saw when we covered the first cycle of speeches (Job 4-14), these speeches began when Job’s friends responded to Job’s lament (Job 3). What began as an effort to comfort Job quickly takes on the air of a tribal council of elders, who, instead of comforting their suffering friend, are now trying to correct him. As this second cycle of speeches unfolds, the discussion becomes more and more confrontational as Job’s friends become angry with him. Job not only refuses to take their advice, but even has the nerve to defend himself against the accusation that the root cause of his plight is the retributive justice of God.

Before we work our way through this second cycle of speeches, we need to keep in mind several key facts. First, the reader knows what neither Job nor his friends know—that Job’s trial by ordeal does not stem from some secret sin in Job’s life, but comes about because God called Satan’s attention to this man Job, who is the apple of God’s eye. Ever-scheming, Satan sees a chance to undercut the foundation of the gospel when he challenges God to remove Job’s prosperity and destroy his family. Satan is convinced that Job is not a righteous man, but a self-centered opportunist who fears God and shuns evil only because God provides Job with all kinds of material blessings. Take them away, Satan contends, and Job will curse God to his face.

Yet when Job’s possessions are taken away and his children are killed, instead, Job praises God. And so Satan tries again. This time Satan dares God to take away Job’s health and predicts that Job will curse God to his face. Once afflicted with a horrible skin disease, Job does not curse God. Again, Job praises God and Satan’s scheme comes to naught. But as time goes on, Job is not only a physical wreck (sick and miserable), deprived of sleep and rest, an outcast forced to live on the town dunghill, but Job’s emotional state deteriorates to the point that what had been unrestrained praise for God, becomes a plaintive cry, “why?” and a demand for vindication. Job is heart-broken at the loss of his children. He is sick. He is an outcast. It is Job who ends the silence, pouring out his heart, speaking at times either

directly to his friends, while at other times speaking directly to God.

A second thing we need to keep in mind is that Job acknowledges that he is a sinner. Job also believes God's promise to provide a redeemer who will save him from his sins, which is why Job made burnt offerings on behalf of himself and his children. He knows that his sins are covered. His blameless and upright life is the fruit of his faith in God's promise to deliver him. This is why Job is so perplexed when these horrible things come to pass. While Job does not disagree with the substance of his friends' arguments to the effect that God is holy and that he must punish all sin, Job knows that this is not the situation regarding him. Job knows that he has done nothing to provoke the kind of divine wrath to bring about the loss of all of his possessions, his children and his health. As his angst increases, Job senses that what is needed is a mediator between the holy God and sinful people. As Job wrestles with those questions associated with the suffering of the righteous, ever so slowly he begins to direct us to the doing and dying of Jesus Christ, that redeemer, who, one day, Job believes, will stand upon the earth.

Third, what probably hurts Job the most is the loss of his good name and reputation. He knows that everyone from his wife, to his three friends, to the citizens of Uz, were all thinking the same thing. "What sin did Job commit which brought all of this to pass?" "What did Job do to bring about such punishment from God?" But Job knows there is no such sin. He cries out for a trial before God even though he knows God's greatness is too much for him. This is why Job demands that God vindicate his good name. Apart from such vindication, it seems to Job that God is his enemy and that the armies of heaven are arrayed against him. Job would rather die than go on feeling like God has turned against him and is punishing him when he has done nothing wrong. Yet throughout this entire ordeal, Job refuses to curse God as Satan predicted he would. Job successfully passes his ordeal, frustrating the schemes of Satan, and introducing the principle into the redemptive drama that a greater Job (Jesus Christ) will one day triumph over Satan through his own perfect obedience.

This brings us to cycle two—round one—as Eliphaz now makes his second speech in Job 15.

Given the fact that Job's friends are orthodox in their theology—God is holy and must punish sin—and given the fact that Job will not admit the obvious (he is being punished, therefore he must have sinned), coupled with the fact that Job is increasingly defiant towards his friends, Eliphaz now gives up all pretense of the genteel manner of his earlier speech. Throughout his second speech, Eliphaz boldly sets out his own wisdom as vastly superior to that of Job's.<sup>1</sup> Eliphaz accuses Job of both folly and impiety.<sup>2</sup> His frustration with Job is now clearly obvious.

Smarting because of Job's complete dismissal of his prior words of wisdom, in Job 15:2-3, Eliphaz gets personal with Job. The gloves are off. Eliphaz asks Job, "*would a wise man answer with empty notions or fill his belly with the hot east wind? Would he argue with useless words, with speeches that have no value?*" Eliphaz casts himself as the wise man, referring to Job as a "hot wind" (a "belly wind").<sup>3</sup> As Eliphaz sees it, Job has shown himself not only to be foolish, but according to verse 4, Job's words are down-right dangerous. "*But you [Job] even undermine piety and hinder devotion to God.*" If people get

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<sup>1</sup> Kline, "Job," p. 474.

<sup>2</sup> Andersen, *Job*, p. 174.

<sup>3</sup> Andersen, *Job*, p. 175.

wind of what Job is saying and act in the same way Job is, this will lead them to question God's will and wisdom. Not a good thing from a man like Job who had been an example to so many.

Up to this point, Job's friends could only make vague accusations that Job had committed some secret sin. But as we read in verses 5-6, Eliphaz now thinks he has something more specific to pin on Job—his defiant speech, which, in Eliphaz's mind, proves his point that Job is not the righteous man everyone assumes him to be. Says Eliphaz, "*your sin prompts your mouth; you adopt the tongue of the crafty. Your own mouth condemns you, not mine; your own lips testify against you.*" Yet, Eliphaz's assessment of Job's sin really does not matter, since God has already declared of Job in Job 1:22, "*In all this, Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing.*" For Eliphaz, the only possible explanation is the retributive justice—God is punishing Job because he has sinned. But Eliphaz has never once even entertained the possibility that Job's ordeal might stem from some other reason, and that God may have a purpose in all this which is not based upon retributive justice. Ironically, it is Eliphaz who limits God. Job has not brought this to pass through some personal sin. But Eliphaz will not consider any other explanation.

In verses 7-10, Eliphaz belittles Job by asking several humiliating questions which stem from Eliphaz's assumption that he has the superior knowledge. "*Are you the first man ever born? Were you brought forth before the hills? Do you listen in on God's council? Do you limit wisdom to yourself? What do you know that we do not know? What insights do you have that we do not have? The gray-haired and the aged are on our side, men even older than your father.*" The gray-haired and aged man is probably a description of Eliphaz, who goes on in verses 11-17, to speak of himself as the one offering God's consolation. He asks Job, "*Are God's consolations not enough for you, words spoken gently to you? Why has your heart carried you away, and why do your eyes flash, so that you vent your rage against God and pour out such words from your mouth? What is man, that he could be pure, or one born of woman, that he could be righteous? If God places no trust in his holy ones, if even the heavens are not pure in his eyes, how much less man, who is vile and corrupt, who drinks up evil like water!*"

In his first speech (Job 5:26), Eliphaz described a good man's death as follows: "*You will come to the grave in full vigor, like sheaves gathered in season.*" Job took issue with this, replying to Eliphaz in Job 7:9-10. "*As a cloud vanishes and is gone, so he who goes down to the grave does not return. He will never come to his house again; his place will know him no more.*" Overhearing Job's response to Eliphaz, Bildad also comments on the fate of the wicked in his speech (Job 8:22). "*Your enemies will be clothed in shame, and the tents of the wicked will be no more.*" Job's response (12:6) to him was: "*The tents of marauders are undisturbed, and those who provoke God are secure—those who carry their god in their hands.*" Eliphaz cannot let this go and the central issue now becomes the fate of the wicked.

In verses 17 through the end of the chapter, Eliphaz speaks in direct rebuttal of Job, doing his best to make the case that not only do the wicked have a miserable death, but that they die before their time. This is the practical outworking of Eliphaz's understanding of the principle of retributive justice. If God must punish all sin, not only will sinners have a miserable life, they will die prematurely. According to Eliphaz, "*Listen to me and I will explain to you; let me tell you what I have seen, what wise men have declared, hiding nothing received from their fathers (to whom alone the land was given when no alien passed among them).*" Notice, that Eliphaz is limited to his own observation, and his own wisdom (which he argued was confirmed by a dream). "*All his days the wicked man suffers torment, the ruthless through all the years stored up for him. Terrifying sounds fill his ears; when all seems well, marauders attack him. He despairs of escaping the darkness; he is marked for the sword. He wanders about—food for vultures; he knows the day of darkness is at hand. Distress and anguish fill him with terror; they overwhelm him, like a king poised to attack, because he shakes his fist at God and vaunts himself against*

*the Almighty, defiantly charging against him with a thick, strong shield. . . . Let him not deceive himself by trusting what is worthless, for he will get nothing in return. Before his time he will be paid in full, and his branches will not flourish.”*

As one commentator points out, it is ironic that Eliphaz calls Job a “belly wind” and yet ends his speech with a series of restatements of the same old argument (“you reap what you sow”).<sup>4</sup> This sets the tone for the entire second cycle of speeches.<sup>5</sup> What Eliphaz cannot handle is the self-evident fact that there are wicked people who prosper and righteous people who suffer. Eliphaz does not appreciate the finer points of eschatology—the “reaping” part may not be fully realized in this life, but will certainly be realized on the day of judgment. The implication from Eliphaz’s speech is not lost upon Job. If Job was really the righteous and upright man he claimed to be, then he would not be suffering. Furthermore, if Job does not admit that Eliphaz is right, then Job is a hypocrite as well.<sup>6</sup> Job is indignant and stands his ground and makes two points in rebuttal: he is not guilty of some horrible sin and God can do as he pleases, even if that does not jibe with the wisdom of his grey-haired, aged friend.

As Job sees it, Eliphaz is speaking for all of his friends. In Job 16:1-5, he dismisses their comments with a fair bit of contempt. *“Then Job replied: ‘I have heard many things like these; miserable comforters are you all! Will your long-winded speeches never end? What ails you that you keep on arguing? I also could speak like you, if you were in my place; I could make fine speeches against you and shake my head at you. But my mouth would encourage you; comfort from my lips would bring you relief.’”* Thus in verse 6, Job makes clear that their many words or his own silence bring him no relief. *“Yet if I speak, my pain is not relieved; and if I refrain, it does not go away.”* Job feels like he is being assailed by his friends and by God. *“Surely, O God, you have worn me out; you have devastated my entire household. You have bound me—and it has become a witness; my gauntness rises up and testifies against me.”*

As we see in verses 9-14, Job feels like God has turned against him. *“God assails me and tears me in his anger and gnashes his teeth at me; my opponent fastens on me his piercing eyes. Men open their mouths to jeer at me; they strike my cheek in scorn and unite together against me. God has turned me over to evil men and thrown me into the clutches of the wicked. All was well with me, but he shattered me; he seized me by the neck and crushed me. He has made me his target; his archers surround me. Without pity, he pierces my kidneys and spills my gall on the ground. Again and again he bursts upon me; he rushes at me like a warrior.”* While this is not the case—we know this to be true from the heavenly scene in the prologue (Job 1 and 2)—we can understand why Job feels the way he does. He’s lost everything. He is sick and miserable. He is an outcast. His friends are now accusing him of something he did not do.

Yet, despite all appearances to the contrary, God is for Job. And Job still hopes for vindication. In Job 16:18:-17:3, we see not only the glowing embers of faith, but the beginning of hope. *“O earth, do not cover my blood; may my cry never be laid to rest! Even now my witness is in heaven; my advocate is on high. My intercessor is my friend as my eyes pour out tears to God; on behalf of a man he pleads with God as a man pleads for his friend. ‘Only a few years will pass before I go on the journey of no return. My spirit is broken, my days are cut short, the grave awaits me. Surely mockers surround me; my eyes*

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<sup>4</sup> Andersen, *Job*, p. 179.

<sup>5</sup> Kline, “Job,” p. 474.

<sup>6</sup> Andersen, *Job*, p. 179.

must dwell on their hostility. *‘Give me, O God, the pledge you demand. Who else will put up security for me?’*” Job now starts to realize that both his answer to the question, “why?” and his ultimate vindication might not come until his own death. Job will get his answer and he will be vindicated, if not in this life, certainly in the next! Job’s eschatology is much better than Eliphaz’s!

Because of his glimmer of hope and because he has faith in the God of the promise (however, weak that faith may be), Job knows his friends cannot help him. This is why his hope is in God. As Job’s mood swings widely, even to the point of despair as seen in Job 17:16-17, nevertheless, Job mocks his friends in the balance of Job 17. *“You have closed their minds to understanding; therefore you will not let them triumph. . . . ‘God has made me a byword to everyone, a man in whose face people spit. My eyes have grown dim with grief; my whole frame is but a shadow. Upright men are appalled at this; the innocent are aroused against the ungodly. Nevertheless, the righteous will hold to their ways, and those with clean hands will grow stronger. ‘But come on, all of you, try again! I will not find a wise man among you. My days have passed, my plans are shattered, and so are the desires of my heart. . . . If the only home I hope for is the grave, if I spread out my bed in darkness, if I say to corruption, ‘You are my father,’ and to the worm, ‘My mother’ or ‘My sister,’ where then is my hope? Who can see any hope for me? Will it go down to the gates of death? Will we descend together into the dust?’”* Not only is Job now giving as good as he is getting, only a man with faith and hope will fight back—as Job is now doing.

In cycle two—round two, it is Bildad’s turn to make his second speech.

One thing is now becoming clear—Job, the sufferer, is now longing to probe deeper into the mysteries of God’s providence, while Job’s friends focus entirely on their distorted views of the suffering of the wicked. Bildad is clearly resentful of Job’s low estimate of his three friends’ theological abilities.<sup>7</sup> Whereas Eliphaz tried to moderate his speech, Bildad is much more cantankerous. In verses 1-4 of Job 18, Bildad responds to Job with words which reflect his growing frustration and anger. *“Then Bildad the Shuhite replied: ‘When will you end these speeches? Be sensible, and then we can talk. Why are we regarded as cattle and considered stupid in your sight? You who tear yourself to pieces in your anger, is the earth to be abandoned for your sake? Or must the rocks be moved from their place?’”* If the law of divine retribution is immutable, and if he refuses to repent, Job will just continue to throw himself against the fixed law that God must punish all sin.<sup>8</sup> How dare Job think that he is above fixed laws!

As Bildad sees it, the moral order of the universe is set in stone. Since God will punish the wicked for their sins, in the balance of the chapter, Bildad now recites a catalogue of the troubles of the wicked, all designed to appeal to Job’s conscience so that he is convicted of sins. The problem with Bildad’s speech is that Job’s conscience is clean. Says Bildad, *“the lamp of the wicked is snuffed out; the flame of his fire stops burning. . . . A trap seizes him by the heel; a snare holds him fast. A noose is hidden for him on the ground; a trap lies in his path. Terrors startle him on every side and dog his every step. Calamity is hungry for him; disaster is ready for him when he falls. It eats away parts of his skin; death’s firstborn devours his limbs. He is torn from the security of his tent and marched off to the king of terrors. Fire resides in his tent; burning sulfur is scattered over his dwelling. . . . The memory of him perishes from the earth; he has no name in the land. . . . He has no offspring or descendants among his people, no survivor where once he lived. Men of the west are appalled at his fate; men of the east are seized with*

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<sup>7</sup> Kline, “Job,” p. 475.

<sup>8</sup> Kline, “Job,” p. 475.

*horror. Surely such is the dwelling of an evil man; such is the place of one who knows not God."*

With that, we come to one of the most remarkable speeches in all the Bible (Job 19). Not only did Job's words inspire Handel, they continue to move all who read them. It is not as though Bildad's words contain no truth. Yes, God will punish the wicked. But Bildad's cold and formulaic "canned" answer does not fit the facts at hand. This may be true of the wicked when they suffer—but what about the righteous? They suffer too. Thus the issue is not what fixed moral law he has broken. For Job, the issue is "why has God turned his back on him?" And so Job presses on, seeking understanding of the great mystery which now stares him in the face: "Why do the wicked prosper while the righteous suffer.?"

In verses 1-12 of Job 19, Job describes his frightful sense of isolation—even though his friends have come to comfort him. *"Then Job replied: 'How long will you torment me and crush me with words? Ten times now you have reproached me; shamelessly you attack me. If it is true that I have gone astray, my error remains my concern alone. If indeed you would exalt yourselves above me and use my humiliation against me, then know that God has wronged me and drawn his net around me. 'Though I cry, 'I've been wronged!' I get no response; though I call for help, there is no justice. He has blocked my way so I cannot pass; he has shrouded my paths in darkness. He has stripped me of my honor and removed the crown from my head. He tears me down on every side till I am gone; he uproots my hope like a tree. His anger burns against me; he counts me among his enemies. His troops advance in force; they build a siege ramp against me and encamp around my tent."* Job longs for that day when God will finally respond to him. The suffering is bad enough. Waiting for an answer from God is even worse.

In the meantime, Job is all alone. He cries out in verses 13-19, *"He has alienated my brothers from me; my acquaintances are completely estranged from me. My kinsmen have gone away; my friends have forgotten me. My guests and my maidservants count me a stranger; they look upon me as an alien . . . My breath is offensive to my wife; I am loathsome to my own brothers . . . All my intimate friends detest me; those I love have turned against me."* Job pleads for pity—not more instruction. *"I am nothing but skin and bones; I have escaped with only the skin of my teeth. 'Have pity on me, my friends, have pity, for the hand of God has struck me. Why do you pursue me as God does? Will you never get enough of my flesh?"* Suddenly, Job has had enough of the accusations and false charges! We are about to witness a remarkable confession of faith!

Since his even his closest friends don't believe him, in verses 23-24 Job now demands that a record of his integrity be written down for all to see. Declares Job, *"Oh, that my words were recorded, that they were written on a scroll, that they were inscribed with an iron tool on lead, or engraved in rock forever!"* Job wants an indelible record so that all who come after him will know that he is innocent and that long after he is gone, he will be vindicated. Given the very early stage of redemptive history in which he writes, Job looks ahead to a time when he will finally be declared "not guilty!" That ever-increasing hope that a redeemer will come (hinted at in Job 9:33 and in Job 16:18 ff.), now comes to full-flower. Despite all that he has endured, in verse 25 Job declares, *"I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth."* Although everyone else doubts him and has deserted him, Job knows that a heavenly *go el* (a redeemer, the next of kin, who rights wrongs and settles estates) will do what his friends, wife and contemporaries will not—believe his testimony and vindicate his good name.

But Job does not stop. In verses 26-27, he declares, *"And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; I myself will see him with my own eyes—I, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!"* Job longs for the resurrection from the dead—a time when his current suffering is but a dim memory and when his sick and afflicted body will be renewed. As one writer puts it, "here are the

beginnings of what progressive revelation would ultimately enunciate in the doctrines of the coming of Christ at the end times, the resurrection of the dead and the final judgment.”<sup>9</sup> Remarkably, Job desires the same thing Paul describes in Philippians 3:7-11. *“But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ--the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.”*

With his eyes now set on the future, Job now warns his friends that the coming resurrection will impact them as well. We read in verses 27-28, *“If you say, ‘How we will hound him, since the root of the trouble lies in him,’ you should fear the sword yourselves; for wrath will bring punishment by the sword, and then you will know that there is judgment.”*

In Cycle two—round three, Zophar has been listening and regards these words as an insult.

Job’s three friends are using the same tired script—focusing exclusively upon the fate of the wicked. As Meredith Kline puts it, “Job [has just] struck chords of redemptive truth as to thrill angels, but Zophar, having ears, hears not. . . . Zophar . . . is content to draw the inspiration for his lyrics from the dunghill where the friends found Job.”<sup>10</sup> So Zophar lets fly in verses 2-14. *“My troubled thoughts prompt me to answer because I am greatly disturbed. I hear a rebuke that dishonors me, and my understanding inspires me to reply. ‘Surely you know how it has been from of old, ever since man was placed on the earth, that the mirth of the wicked is brief, the joy of the godless lasts but a moment. Though his pride reaches to the heavens and his head touches the clouds, he will perish forever, like his own dung; those who have seen him will say, ‘Where is he? . . . The youthful vigor that fills his bones will lie with him in the dust. ‘Though evil is sweet in his mouth and he hides it under his tongue, though he cannot bear to let it go and keeps it in his mouth, yet his food will turn sour in his stomach; it will become the venom of serpents within him.’”* After much more of the same, Zophar concludes in verses 27-29, *“the heavens will expose his guilt; the earth will rise up against him. A flood will carry off his house, rushing waters on the day of God’s wrath. Such is the fate God allots the wicked, the heritage appointed for them by God.”*

As Job sees it, his friends have not offered any explanations at all. Rather, they have denied the mystery of suffering and affliction, simply because their view of retributive justice does not fit with reality. There are wicked people who flourish and righteous people who suffer. Yes, Job’s friends are right—God will punish all sin and reward good. But Job is starting to see that this punishment will come at the end of time (on judgment day) and not beforehand. With faith and hope stirring his heart, Job rises above his disappointment and answers Zophar with words of hope.

In Job 21:2-3 Job challenges his friends. *“Listen carefully to my words; let this be the consolation you give me. Bear with me while I speak, and after I have spoken, mock on.”* In verses 4-9, we see that Job looks for an answer from God: *“Is my complaint directed to man? Why should I not be impatient? Look*

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<sup>9</sup> Kline, “Job,” p. 476.

<sup>10</sup> Kline, “Job,” p. 476.

*at me and be astonished; clap your hand over your mouth. When I think about this, I am terrified; trembling seizes my body. Why do the wicked live on, growing old and increasing in power? They see their children established around them, their offspring before their eyes. Their homes are safe and free from fear; the rod of God is not upon them.”* The fact of the matter is that the wicked do live on. The ground does not swallow them. The fate that has befallen Job does not fall upon them. Oh, they will be judged, but on the last day, not necessarily in the course of this life.

The answer is slowly beginning to come to Job, as we see in verses 14-20 of Job 21. *“Yet they say to God, 'Leave us alone! We have no desire to know your ways. Who is the Almighty, that we should serve him? What would we gain by praying to him?' But their prosperity is not in their own hands, so I stand aloof from the counsel of the wicked. `Yet how often is the lamp of the wicked snuffed out? How often does calamity come upon them, the fate God allots in his anger? How often are they like straw before the wind, like chaff swept away by a gale? It is said, 'God stores up a man's punishment for his sons.' Let him repay the man himself, so that he will know it! Let his own eyes see his destruction; let him drink of the wrath of the Almighty.”* Though his friends are convinced they are right, Job is now fully convinced that they are not. In fact, as he ends his reply to Zophar, he tells his friends in verse 34, *“So how can you console me with your nonsense? Nothing is left of your answers but falsehood!”*

Not only are the smoldering embers of faith still burning in Job's heart, he is sure that Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar have no answers, only falsehoods. Job is a justified sinner. He is a righteous man, and yet still he suffers. The words of his friends hurt deeply, they do not heal. They cannot explain the obvious—wicked people do prosper, and righteous people do suffer. As Job is beginning to see, God may indeed have a purpose in suffering which does not fit with Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar's insufficient grasp of the nature of things. And Job's heart is stirred and moves him to confess his faith, even through tears of pain, doubt and fear! Job knows that his redeemer lives! He knows his redeemer will one day stand upon the earth. Job knows that he will see that redeemer with the eyes of a resurrected body!

Only one more cycle of discussion remains in Job 22-26. The argument becomes more heated before abruptly coming to a halt. Eliphaz and Bildad will give it one more try. And Job will have his say as well before the Lord answers all of them from the midst of the storm.

## “I Will Maintain My Righteousness”

*Texts: Job 22:1-27:23; Romans 3:21-26*

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It started in chapter three with Job’s heart-felt lament. Then his three friends, Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar ended their silence, apparently seeking to comfort their suffering friend. But it soon became clear that Job’s friends were not trying to comfort him as much as they were trying to confront him. And Job will have none of it. And so a dialogue between friends quickly escalates into a full-blown argument. Job defiantly rejects the self-righteous counsel from his friends, all of whom believe that the reason why Job is suffering has to do with the fact that Job had committed some secret sin which brought down the retributive justice of God upon his head. Job not only denies he has committed such a sin, he rejects their analysis of the facts at hand. He will continue to defend himself and his honor and proclaim his innocence.

We now wrap up what is described as the “debate” section of Job, as we turn to the third and final cycle of these ever-intensifying speeches from Job’s friends, along with Job’s increasingly defiant replies. What had been only hinted at in the opening cycle of speeches—that Job must have committed some secret sin—is now fully out in the open. Not only do Job’s friends openly accuse him of wrong-doing, they regard Job’s denial of having sinned and his rejection of their understanding of the principle of divine retribution as concrete evidence that Job is not the righteous man people think that he is. Job’s audacious defense of his good name, and his complete rejection of his friend’s position that God necessarily punishes the wicked and rewards the righteous in this life, strikes all of Job’s friends as a denial of a fundamental theological truth. Job’s friends cannot understand why Job fails to see the obvious! While it is true that God must punish the wicked, what Job is starting to realize and that his friends do not see, is that God may have a purpose in the suffering of the righteous, which is not connected to a principle of retributive justice. Something Job’s friends refuse to even consider.

As we have seen throughout the earlier chapters of Job, keeping the context and structure of this book in mind is absolutely essential if we are to understand the book’s primary message, which is that Job’s suffering points us ahead to the greater Job, Jesus Christ, in whom all the mysteries of God’s providence will be finally and fully revealed. Based upon the heavenly scene in the prologue (Job 1-2), we know the reason why Job is suffering. Thinking that Job is a self-righteous hypocrite, Satan asked God’s permission to take away Job’s possessions and his family, and when that failed to expose Job’s supposed hypocrisy, Satan asks God to take away Job’s health. Thus, Job must undergo a trial by ordeal so as to establish one of the fundamental principles of redemptive history, that Satan will be defeated by the suffering and perfect obedience of Jesus Christ.

But neither Job nor his friends know this to be the case. The great irony is that while Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar relentlessly seek to convince Job of their understanding of the nature of things—that God must punish the wicked in this life—Job has moved on from this misunderstanding of God’s justice, to probe the deeper mysteries of God’s providence. The depths and degree of his suffering have pushed Job well beyond the superficial and self-righteous judgments of his friends. While Job is becoming convinced that what he needs is a mediator (a *go el*, a kinsman redeemer, who will argue his case before God on his

behalf), the great irony is that all three of his friends think Job is a hypocrite because Job denies their faulty understanding of God's retributive justice. This is the same assessment of Job made by Satan, as we saw in the prologue. And so in the name of defending God and his honor, just as Job's wife had done, Job's friends are actually doing the Devil's bidding, when they insist that Job is no true servant of God, seen in the fact of his suffering and in his stubborn refusal to heed the counsel of his friends.<sup>1</sup>

Despite the depths of his pain and despair, in the previous round of speeches we have witnessed Job "get his dander up". While his friends continue to ignore his feelings and don't demonstrate even a modicum of compassion to their friend, Job's faith and hope are ever so slowly being rekindled throughout these cycles of dialogue. In Job 19:23-27, we hear these remarkable words from Job, "*Oh, that my words were recorded, that they were written on a scroll, that they were inscribed with an iron tool on lead, or engraved in rock forever! I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; I myself will see him with my own eyes-I, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!*"

Job wants an abiding record of his innocence written in stone so that long after he is dead and gone his good name will live on. Despite the repeated assertions from his friends that the suffering of the wicked is proof that their understanding of the retributive principle of divine justice is the right one, instead Job's eyes are firmly fixed on the future. Job longs for a mediator. He not only knows his redeemer lives; Job firmly believes that one day this same redeemer will stand upon the earth and that Job will see him with his own eyes. Job longs for that day of resurrection when his diseased flesh will be raised from the grave imperishable. It is clear that Job's understanding of these matters now greatly exceeds the faulty application of the principle of retributive justice on the part of his friends. The sufferer is becoming wise, while those who think themselves to be wise reveal the depths of their folly.

**A**nd so with that we now come to Job 22 and cycle three—round one, which includes the final speech from Eliphaz, along with Job's response.

Apparently realizing that Job is not at all impressed with his arguments that the wicked live miserable lives and die young, Eliphaz greatly ratchets up the intensity of his words. He is obviously worried about Job's soul. Sadly, Eliphaz has utterly failed to grasp either the substance of Job's arguments, nor is Eliphaz able to empathize with Job. Job does not need a theological lecture, but compassion from his friends. Then again, since Eliphaz thinks Job is self-deceived, instead he tries to point out that Job's assertion that God does not care, only proves the point that he has been trying to make all along—Job is not the upright and blameless man everyone has thought him to be.

The growing intensity of this debate is clearly seen in verses 1-4 of Job 22. "*Then Eliphaz the Temanite replied: 'Can a man be of benefit to God? Can even a wise man benefit him? What pleasure would it give the Almighty if you were righteous? What would he gain if your ways were blameless? 'Is it for your piety that he rebukes you and brings charges against you?'*" According to Eliphaz, Job is not being punished because he fears God. No, he's being punished because he is guilty of blasphemy, for stating that God is indifferent to human behavior—good or evil. Job, supposedly, has denied the principle of retributive justice. For that alone, he should be punished by God.

Then in verses 5-11, Eliphaz openly accuses Job of being a sinner. "*Is not your wickedness great? Are*

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<sup>1</sup> Kline, "Job," p. 477.

*not your sins endless? You demanded security from your brothers for no reason; you stripped men of their clothing, leaving them naked. You gave no water to the weary and you withheld food from the hungry, though you were a powerful man, owning land-an honored man, living on it. And you sent widows away empty-handed and broke the strength of the fatherless. That is why snares are all around you, why sudden peril terrifies you, why it is so dark you cannot see, and why a flood of water covers you.”* Having no proof whatsoever of any wrong-doing on Job’s part, Eliphaz directly accuses Job of misusing his wealth so as to exploit the poor. In Eliphaz’s flawed thinking, this explains why Job’s wealth was taken from him. Not knowing that Job’s trial by ordeal has its roots in God’s redemptive purposes and not in some sin Job has supposedly committed,<sup>2</sup> Eliphaz’s remarks are not only patently false, they are utterly cruel. The intended comforter has become an accuser—a mouthpiece of Satan.

Thinking that what his suffering friend needs most is to be reminded of God’s greatness so that he will repent, in verses 12-20 Eliphaz turns Job’s words on their head, putting blasphemies in Job’s mouth which he never uttered.<sup>3</sup> While Job has complained about feeling like he is under God’s constant surveillance, without being able to see the hand of God in his afflictions, Eliphaz turns this into an argument that Job’s view separates God from the world.<sup>4</sup> Eliphaz drones on, “*is not God in the heights of heaven? And see how lofty are the highest stars! Yet you say, ‘What does God know? Does he judge through such darkness? Thick clouds veil him, so he does not see us as he goes about in the vaulted heavens.’ Will you keep to the old path that evil men have trod? They were carried off before their time, their foundations washed away by a flood. They said to God, ‘Leave us alone! What can the Almighty do to us?’ Yet it was he who filled their houses with good things, so I stand aloof from the counsel of the wicked. The righteous see their ruin and rejoice; the innocent mock them, saying, ‘Surely our foes are destroyed, and fire devours their wealth.’”*

This is not what Job said, nor what he meant. Eliphaz hasn’t been listening. What Job did do is tell his friends how he feels—like God has abandoned him. But his friends never once put themselves in Job’s place. They see Job’s comments as fruit of a hidden, dark side of his life, filled with sin. Given their understanding of God’s retributive justice, there can be no other explanation—unless they are wrong. But they are not wrong, because they are not the ones suffering. Job knows that he is innocent and that he has committed no secret sin. He cannot understand why all of this has come to pass. He also knows that righteous people suffer and that wicked people prosper. He has never denied that God must punish the wicked. Job is beginning to understand that God may indeed have a purpose in his own suffering and that God’s punishment of sinners and rewarding of the righteous may not take place until the day of judgment. It may well be that we cannot tell by observation whether people are righteous or sinful, solely based upon whether they suffer or prosper—the erroneous view of Job’s friends.

Since Eliphaz cannot understand how a blameless and upright man could say the things that Job has said, he is clearly concerned for the state of Job’s soul. If Job wants to be delivered from his predicament he needs to stop arguing with his friends, heed their instruction, and repent of his sins. This concern for his friend, certainly explains why in verses 21-30, Eliphaz urges Job to seek the mercy of God, before it is too late. “*Submit to God and be at peace with him; in this way prosperity will come to you. Accept*

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<sup>2</sup> Kline, “Job,” p. 478.

<sup>3</sup> Kline, “Job,” p. 478

<sup>4</sup> Andersen, *Job*, p. 204.

*instruction from his mouth and lay up his words in your heart. If you return to the Almighty, you will be restored: If you remove wickedness far from your tent and assign your nuggets to the dust, your gold of Ophir to the rocks in the ravines, then the Almighty will be your gold, the choicest silver for you. Surely then you will find delight in the Almighty and will lift up your face to God. You will pray to him, and he will hear you, and you will fulfill your vows. What you decide on will be done, and light will shine on your ways. When men are brought low and you say, 'Lift them up!' then he will save the downcast. He will deliver even one who is not innocent, who will be delivered through the cleanness of your hands.'"*

Again, Eliphaz is speaking the truth. But the issue is that his words do not apply to Job.<sup>5</sup> Job has not committed some secret sin. God has already told us that even in the depths of his despair, Job has not sinned by charging God with wrong-doing. Furthermore, Eliphaz speaks with a self-righteous, Pharisaical tone, based upon the erroneous assumption that Job is wrong and that Eliphaz absolutely has it down pat. Given Eliphaz's condescending attitude, we wonder how his own words must have come back to haunt him, when at the conclusion of the story (Job 42:7-9), we learn that Job must make intercession with God on behalf of his friends.<sup>6</sup> Job will be vindicated in the end!

In his response (Job 23), Job completely ignores Eliphaz's speech, returning to the themes of his prior speech in Job 21. What strikes Job is the great mystery of God's providence. Job cannot see what his three friends think is self-evident. Job cannot understand why the righteous suffer, nor why the wicked prosper. But he knows he has not sinned and he digs in his heels all the more against the notion that his own suffering is divine retribution. Only a person who is innocent puts up this kind of fight. This is why in Job 23:2-9, Job wants to appear before God so as to be vindicated. What troubles Job is that it seems to him as though God cannot be found.<sup>7</sup> *"Even today my complaint is bitter; his hand is heavy in spite of my groaning. If only I knew where to find him; if only I could go to his dwelling! I would state my case before him and fill my mouth with arguments. I would find out what he would answer me, and consider what he would say. Would he oppose me with great power? No, he would not press charges against me. There an upright man could present his case before him, and I would be delivered forever from my judge. `But if I go to the east, he is not there; if I go to the west, I do not find him. When he is at work in the north, I do not see him; when he turns to the south, I catch no glimpse of him."*

But God knows where to find Job. In verses 10-17, Job continues to defend his conduct. *"But he knows the way that I take; when he has tested me, I will come forth as gold. My feet have closely followed his steps; I have kept to his way without turning aside. I have not departed from the commands of his lips; I have treasured the words of his mouth more than my daily bread. `But he stands alone, and who can oppose him? He does whatever he pleases. He carries out his decree against me, and many such plans he still has in store. That is why I am terrified before him; when I think of all this, I fear him. God has made my heart faint; the Almighty has terrified me. Yet I am not silenced by the darkness, by the thick darkness that covers my face."* If Job has not sinned, and if the righteous suffer in this life, then Job realizes that he's run directly into the mystery of God's sovereign decree which determines whatsoever comes to pass. The thought of this strikes Job with terror. Yet, he must speak in his defense!

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<sup>5</sup> Andersen, *Job*, p. 205.

<sup>6</sup> Kline, "Job," p. 478.

<sup>7</sup> Kline, "Job," p. 478.

If God's retributive justice cannot be reduced to the simplistic formulas of his three friends, then why do the righteous suffer and the wicked go unpunished? What purpose does God have in all of this? Job continues in verses 1-12 of Job 24, "*Why does the Almighty not set times for judgment? Why must those who know him look in vain for such days? Men move boundary stones; they pasture flocks they have stolen. They drive away the orphan's donkey and take the widow's ox in pledge. They thrust the needy from the path and force all the poor of the land into hiding. Like wild donkeys in the desert, the poor go about their labor of foraging food; the wasteland provides food for their children. They gather fodder in the fields and glean in the vineyards of the wicked. Lacking clothes, they spend the night naked; they have nothing to cover themselves in the cold. They are drenched by mountain rains and hug the rocks for lack of shelter. The fatherless child is snatched from the breast; the infant of the poor is seized for a debt. Lacking clothes, they go about naked; they carry the sheaves, but still go hungry. They crush olives among the terraces; they tread the winepresses, yet suffer thirst. The groans of the dying rise from the city, and the souls of the wounded cry out for help. But God charges no one with wrongdoing.*" Job does not understand. How can God allow the strong to exploit the weak? When will judgment befall them? Why? When? How? None of this fits with Job's hope in a coming redeemer.

It is not until we come to Job 24:22-25 that Job's "thinking out loud," comes to its logical conclusion. "*But God drags away the mighty by his power; though they become established, they have no assurance of life. He may let them rest in a feeling of security, but his eyes are on their ways. For a little while they are exalted, and then they are gone; they are brought low and gathered up like all others; they are cut off like heads of grain. `If this is not so, who can prove me false and reduce my words to nothing?'"* Yes, the wicked will get what is coming to them! No doubt, there is truth in what his friends have been saying. God will judge the wicked who exploit others. What Job cannot yet answer is that question which has haunted him from the beginning. None of this applies to him. And yet, why is he suffering?<sup>8</sup>

In Job 25, we have the very short and final speech from Bildad, along with Job's response.

After three increasingly heated exchanges, Job and his friends have clearly run out of steam. But like trains passing on parallel tracks, Job and Eliphaz have been speaking past each other. The same holds true for the speeches of Bildad and Zophar. The wisdom of Job's friends can take them no farther than their own observation and their misguided view that the wicked live miserable lives and die young. Job has heard their case and has repeatedly pointed out the flaws of this argument, although he himself is still struggling to come to terms with the mysteries of God's providence.

This time Bildad has very little to say, merely parroting Eliphaz. Most notably, Bildad completely avoids Job's challenge in verse 24 of the previous chapter altogether—"who can prove me false?" Bildad does not even try, and Zophar does not even speak, something noted by Job later on in 29:22—"After I had spoken, they spoke no more; my words fell gently on their ears." So the heated argument abruptly grinds to a halt with the lame words from Bildad recorded in Job 25: "*Then Bildad the Shuhite replied: `Dominion and awe belong to God; he establishes order in the heights of heaven. Can his forces be numbered? Upon whom does his light not rise? How then can a man be righteous before God? How can one born of woman be pure? If even the moon is not bright and the stars are not pure in his eyes, how much less man, who is but a maggot—a son of man, who is only a worm!*" In contrast to the glories of the heavens, Job is but a worm of a man. For Bildad, Job's situation is plain. God is holy and must punish sin. Since Job is obviously being punished for his sins, Job is not a righteous man. Simply

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<sup>8</sup> Andersen, *Job*, p. 213.

repeating the same thing over and over will have no impact upon Job, who has heard it all before.

In Job 26-27, we have the first part of a long discourse in which Job defends his righteousness.

Job's response to Bildad is a response to this final speech and also serves as Job's response to all the prior speeches from his friends. In fact, Job's discourse runs all the way to the end of Job 31, before a new character, Elihu begins to speak in Job 32. We will tackle the first part of Job's discourse (chapters 26-27) in which a strange role reversal now begins to take place. Aware that his friends cannot deal with the mysteries of God's providence and the suffering of the righteous and after sarcastically responding to Bildad in chapter 26, in chapter 27 Job begins to assume the role of the teacher, not only proclaiming his own righteousness, but contrasting his own personal experience of suffering with that of the wicked.

Job is beginning to see that ultimately the explanation for his suffering is connected to the wisdom of God. Bildad and his friends have already made this point. After berating Bildad, Job points out that God's wisdom so far surpasses our comprehension, that we only expose our foolishness by limiting God's ways to a faulty and wooden application of the principle of divine retribution as his friends have done. Thus, in the first four verses of Job 26, Job responds to Bildad with utter disdain. *"Then Job replied: 'How you have helped the powerless! How you have saved the arm that is feeble! What advice you have offered to one without wisdom! And what great insight you have displayed! Who has helped you utter these words? And whose spirit spoke from your mouth?'"* It is clear to Job that Bildad's wisdom is not so wise after all. Job senses, but does not know, what the reader knows—that the final speeches from Eliphaz and Bildad actually echo the words of Satan, not God.<sup>9</sup>

As Job begins to consider the mysterious ways of God, he considers that God's dominion is without end or limit. In verses 5-14, Job describes the glories and powers of the sovereign God. *"The dead are in deep anguish, those beneath the waters and all that live in them. Death is naked before God; Destruction lies uncovered. He spreads out the northern skies over empty space; he suspends the earth over nothing. He wraps up the waters in his clouds, yet the clouds do not burst under their weight. He covers the face of the full moon, spreading his clouds over it. He marks out the horizon on the face of the waters for a boundary between light and darkness. The pillars of the heavens quake, aghast at his rebuke. By his power he churned up the sea; by his wisdom he cut Rahab [the name of the serpent] to pieces. By his breath the skies became fair; his hand pierced the gliding serpent. And these are but the outer fringe of his works; how faint the whisper we hear of him! Who then can understand the thunder of his power?"* Obviously, Job knows that Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar do not understand the ways of the Lord. They cannot explain the obvious—the righteous suffer and the wicked prosper.

Beginning in Job 27, Job now assumes his role as teacher. He begins by asserting one more time that he is a righteous man, who has not brought down God's wrath through some secret sin. In verses 1-7, Job swears an oath which clearly illustrates the heart of his dilemma. *"And Job continued his discourse: 'As surely as God lives, who has denied me justice, the Almighty, who has made me taste bitterness of soul, as long as I have life within me, the breath of God in my nostrils, my lips will not speak wickedness, and my tongue will utter no deceit. I will never admit you are in the right; till I die, I will not deny my integrity. I will maintain my righteousness and never let go of it; my conscience will not reproach me as long as I live. 'May my enemies be like the wicked, my adversaries like the unjust!'"*

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<sup>9</sup> Kline, "Job," p. 479.

On the one hand, Job boldly proclaims his faith in the living God, while on the other, Job complains about feeling like he is being treated unjustly. Job is not going to admit to something he did not do despite all that his wife and friends have put him through. Job knows that God is sovereign and that he can do with Job whatever he wishes. Job does not deny that. Nor, does Job accuse God of wrong-doing. What Job is saying that his conscience is clean. He has trusted in God to save him from his sins. His great piety is a fruit of that justifying faith. His friends are wrong. But what Job does demand is an explanation from God. Job does not understand how God's mercy toward sinners can be squared with God's justice. Why is the judgment of the wicked delayed? Why must the righteous suffer? It is not until Job's hoped-for mediator and redeemer has come that we get our answer!

What Job does not know is that God's mercy and justice will embrace in a glorious messianic age yet to come. It falls to the apostle Paul, who sets out the precise relationship between God's justice and mercy in Romans 3:21-26: *"But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished—he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus."* It will take a sinless and perfectly obedient savior, who bears God's wrath in his own body, to resolve what Job sees as an unresolvable dilemma, "how can God be both just and merciful?"

Having declared his innocence and silenced his friends and with his faith and hope beginning to grow, Job (who is a graduate of the school of suffering) is able to clearly contrast his suffering with that of the wicked. Beginning in verse 8 of Job 27, Job states, *"for what hope has the godless when he is cut off, when God takes away his life? Does God listen to his cry when distress comes upon him?"* The obvious implication is that God is still listening to Job, unlike the wicked. *"Will he find delight in the Almighty? Will he call upon God at all times?"* Obviously not. And yet Job has called upon God all along.

Taking the role of teacher, Job tells his friends in verse 11: *"I will teach you about the power of God; the ways of the Almighty I will not conceal. You have all seen this yourselves. Why then this meaningless talk? Here is the fate God allots to the wicked, the heritage a ruthless man receives from the Almighty: However many his children, their fate is the sword; his offspring will never have enough to eat. The plague will bury those who survive him, and their widows will not weep for them. Though he heaps up silver like dust and clothes like piles of clay, what he lays up the righteous will wear, and the innocent will divide his silver. The house he builds is like a moth's cocoon, like a hut made by a watchman. He lies down wealthy, but will do so no more; when he opens his eyes, all is gone. Terrors overtake him like a flood; a tempest snatches him away in the night. The east wind carries him off, and he is gone; it sweeps him out of his place. It hurls itself against him without mercy as he flees headlong from its power. It claps its hands in derision and hisses him out of his place."*

Yes, Job has learned something from the arguments of his friends. God punishes the wicked—sometimes in this life. But what his friends cannot understand is that the wicked may prosper for a season, and as Job the veteran sufferer can tell us, there is no necessarily and observable connection between someone's current suffering and whether or not they are wicked. Nothing has hurt Job as deeply as three armchair theologians trying to correct him based upon a faulty application of God's justice, when they should have been showing their suffering friend some compassion. And yet what Job does not know as he struggles for an answer to the mysterious purposes of God is that he will get one, from God himself. And Job will

be silenced when God speaks to him from the midst of a whirlwind. Be careful about what you ask for! God might just give you an answer and it may not be what you want to hear.

## “The Fear of the Lord—That Is Wisdom”

*Texts: Job 28:1-31:40; Romans 11:33-36*

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The heated argument between Job and his three friends has come to a halt. Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar have been unable to convince their suffering friend that the reason why he has lost his family, health, and possessions is because he has sinned and needs to repent. Indeed, Job refuses to budge from his conviction that he has done nothing whatsoever to bring God’s judgment down upon him. We have also witnessed Job’s faith and hope slowly but surely begin to grow, even while his friends accuse him of all kinds of sin which he has not committed and even though his friends are convinced that he’s become nothing but a “belly wind.” After three cycles of speeches, Job’s friends have been finally silenced. The sufferer now assumes the role of teacher. Repeatedly defending his good name and crying out for God to vindicate him, this time Job almost goes too far. But before he can do so, he is silenced. Job will get what he asks for—an audience with God. He will get a lesson in the mysteries of God’s providence which will put everything in perspective.

We now come to that section in the Book of Job (chapters 28-31) where Job looks back on the days before he lost everything, contrasting the joy of days past with his present misery. Job will make yet another impassioned defense of his personal honor, again insisting that he be vindicated by God.<sup>1</sup> Apparently, all of the speeches and Job’s replies, as well as Job’s closing speech, are overheard by a crowd of onlookers, one of whom, Elihu, will speak his mind in Job 32-37. Elihu agrees with Job, that his three friends have widely missed the mark. But Elihu will also assert that Job has erred by insisting upon vindicating himself, when instead he should have sought to vindicate God. The speech from Elihu in turn sets the stage for what follows in Job 38-40:2, when the Lord speaks to Job, giving him the very thing he’s been demanding—an answer to the mystery of providence and the suffering of the righteous. When God speaks, all the participants fall silent. The Lord will have the final word.

Recall that the main argument raised by Job’s three friends was this simple syllogism: God is holy. God must punish all sin. Job is being punished. Therefore, Job must have sinned. This simplistic solution is repeated over and over again by his friends and is designed to encourage Job to come clean and repent of his sins so that God can then restore him. His friends are increasingly frustrated because Job will not admit what they think to be obvious—the wicked live miserable and short lives. Since Job is sick and suffering, the conclusion is obvious—he too must be wicked. While Job never denies that this argument contains some degree of truth, the fact of the matter is not only do the wicked prosper for a time, but the righteous may suffer for a season. But the primary reason for Job’s indignation is that none of these arguments apply to him. Job is a justified sinner, whose faith in God’s promise to save him from his sins is manifest through his fear of God, his shunning of evil, and in his blameless and upright behavior. Job knows that he has done nothing to provoke God to respond to him in judgment. The retributive principle of God’s justice, as understood by his friends is not only wrong, it surely does not apply to him.

Job knows that God is sovereign and Job has no doubt that God can do whatever he wishes. The

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<sup>1</sup> Andersen, *Job*, p. 230.

question is not whether God can do as he pleases, but why God has allowed an upright and blameless man like Job to suffer. If God is as good as Job believes him to be, then God must vindicate Job in the end. This is why Job is not at all satisfied with the wooden application of the principle of divine retribution offered by his friends. Slowly but surely Job is beginning to realize that what he needs is a heavenly mediator and redeemer who will intercede before God on his behalf. While Job dismisses the theological errors of his friends—not to mention the self-righteous and cruel way in which such counsel was offered—Job begins to “think out loud” about the mysteries of divine providence. On the one hand, Job offers a stirring confession of faith in 19:23-27, “*I know my redeemer lives,*” while on the other, he turns around and claims in 27:2 that God “*has denied me justice.*” Job knows he is innocent. But he cannot yet fathom the mysteries of God. In the midst of his pain and humiliation, he boldly professes his faith and yet demands an answer as to why God seems so far away. Job will get one.

Last time we covered the first two chapters of Job’s closing speech in chapters 26-27, which serves as Job’s reply to the final speech from Bildad, as well as to all three cycles of speeches. We continue with Job’s closing discourse, picking up where we left off last time. In chapter 28, Job now turns to the theme of God’s wisdom, which is in many ways a continuation of Job’s comments offered 27:11 when he declared, “*I will teach you about the power of God; the ways of the Almighty I will not conceal.*”<sup>2</sup> The sufferer has become the teacher and the seeker of divine wisdom.

Throughout this entire discourse Job’s true piety and deep spiritual fervor are readily apparent, even though his friends cannot see it because they are offended when Job does not agree with them.<sup>3</sup> Now that the debate is over and nothing is settled, Job begins to explore the question, “where can true wisdom be found?” He knows that his three friends don’t have such wisdom! They can’t even explain why wicked people prosper or why the righteous suffer. This lack of wisdom can be seen in Bildad’s final speech in chapter 25, when, out of a sense of frustration, he told Job that men are nothing but maggots (Job 25:6). While men and women are indeed sinful, the fact that men and women are still divine image-bearers requires that Job embrace a higher view of human nature (a “wiser” view). We have been created but a little bit lower than the angels. Yes, Job knows that men and women are sinful. He also knows that men and women are not maggots. It takes divine wisdom to move beyond the faulty views of his friends.

The quest for such wisdom now occupies Job’s full attention. In the first 11 verses of Job 28, Job expresses his deep admiration for those who mine the earth seeking its buried treasures.<sup>4</sup> Job does this not because he is interested in mining, but to make a point about wisdom. Says Job, “*there is a mine for silver and a place where gold is refined. Iron is taken from the earth, and copper is smelted from ore. Man puts an end to the darkness; he searches the farthest recesses for ore in the blackest darkness. Far from where people dwell he cuts a shaft, in places forgotten by the foot of man; far from men he dangles and sways. The earth, from which food comes, is transformed below as by fire; sapphires come from its rocks, and its dust contains nuggets of gold. No bird of prey knows that hidden path, no falcon's eye has seen it. Proud beasts do not set foot on it, and no lion prowls there. Man's hand assaults the flinty rock and lays bare the roots of the mountains. He tunnels through the rock; his eyes see all its treasures. He searches the sources of the rivers and brings hidden things to light.*”

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<sup>2</sup> Kline, “Job,” p. 480.

<sup>3</sup> Kline, “Job,” p. 480.

<sup>4</sup> Andersen, *Job*, p. 224.

Despite the ability of the men of Job's age to mine the earth for its great mineral wealth, as stated in verse 12, Job is aware that true wisdom it is not found in the mines of the earth, nor among its creatures. *"But where can wisdom be found? Where does understanding dwell?"* Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar are limited to natural revelation—just like men and women are limited to the earth when searching for precious minerals. While they are ingenious in their quest for wealth, they are limited to the earth. But true wisdom—which comes only from God—cannot be found in riches. Such wisdom cannot be purchased, nor can its depths be plumbed merely through the observation of the earth or of its creatures.

Beginning in verse 13, Job makes his case that divine wisdom is the real treasure men ought to be seeking. *"Man does not comprehend its worth; it cannot be found in the land of the living. The deep says, 'It is not in me'; the sea says, 'It is not with me.' It cannot be bought with the finest gold, nor can its price be weighed in silver. It cannot be bought with the gold of Ophir, with precious onyx or sapphires. Neither gold nor crystal can compare with it, nor can it be had for jewels of gold. Coral and jasper are not worthy of mention; the price of wisdom is beyond rubies. The topaz of Cush cannot compare with it; it cannot be bought with pure gold."* Nothing is as valuable as that which God reveals in his word.

Job knows what he needs. He knows what really matters. His suffering has made all quite clear. Thus, in verse 20, he again asks the question, *"where then does wisdom come from? Where does understanding dwell?"* Job knows that only God possesses infinite wisdom. Such wisdom cannot be found in the land of the living or of the dead. Job continues this quest in verse 21, *"It is hidden from the eyes of every living thing, concealed even from the birds of the air. Destruction and Death say, 'Only a rumor of it has reached our ears.' God understands the way to it and he alone knows where it dwells, for he views the ends of the earth and sees everything under the heavens. When he established the force of the wind and measured out the waters, when he made a decree for the rain and a path for the thunderstorm, then he looked at wisdom and appraised it; he confirmed it and tested it."*

God's wisdom is the foundation of all created things—a theme taken up in Proverbs 8:22-31 where Wisdom is personified in the person of the preincarnate Jesus Christ: *"The LORD brought me forth as the first of his works, before his deeds of old; I was appointed from eternity, from the beginning, before the world began. When there were no oceans, I was given birth, when there were no springs abounding with water; before the mountains were settled in place, before the hills, I was given birth, before he made the earth or its fields or any of the dust of the world. I was there when he set the heavens in place, when he marked out the horizon on the face of the deep, when he established the clouds above and fixed securely the fountains of the deep, when he gave the sea its boundary so the waters would not overstep his command, and when he marked out the foundations of the earth. Then I was the craftsman at his side. I was filled with delight day after day, rejoicing always in his presence, rejoicing in his whole world and delighting in mankind."* While God's wisdom is the foundation for all created things, the content of that wisdom is difficult to specifically identify, since natural revelation is distorted by human sinfulness.

Divine wisdom is therefore most fully revealed in special revelation—God's speeches and acts of redemption. Such wisdom is codified in God's law—particularly in the covenant of works God established with Adam in Eden, the specific terms of which are republished in the Ten Commandments. The realization that true wisdom must be revealed to us by God is, therefore, the place to begin the quest. It is clear that Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar have not discovered true wisdom, based solely upon their observation of the world and the lives of those around them. Having suffered to the degree to which Job has and having heard the best arguments his friends have to offer, Job knows that unless God reveals true wisdom to his people, it will never be fully discovered by mere observation.

Thus Job declares in verse 28, *“The fear of the Lord—that is wisdom, and to shun evil is understanding.”* Everything done apart from such wisdom is only so much vanity. Job now sees this in the bone-headed arguments of his three friends. To seek wisdom apart from God’s self-revelation is to cut one’s self off from the only source of true wisdom. To seek for wisdom through observation of the people around you is like trying to study astronomy without a using telescope. It is not that what you observe is incorrect, it is limited. True wisdom must be sought where God reveals it—in the moral law, which is the foundation of natural law. To fear God—which is to be consecrated to him through God’s covenant promises in the gospel and through their ratification in the sacraments—is the source and chief part of wisdom.<sup>5</sup>

Again, the words of Job, anticipate the words of Paul, this time seen in one of Paul’s doxologies in Romans 11:33-36. *“Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! `Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?’ `Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him?’ For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen.”* Simply put, to fear God means that we seek wisdom, where God reveals it—in his word—and not by looking within or through personal experience or observation, as Job’s friends have lamely tried to do. For no one has known the mind of the Lord, unless and until God reveals his mind to us in his word. This is what Job seeks.

**I**n Chapters 29-31, we find Job’s final protest as the debate is now over and the stage is being set for Job’s amazing encounter with God which brings this book to a close.

In this final monologue, Job restates and summarizes his case. Throughout, he speaks both to his friends and to God. As one commentator points out, in this discourse Job restates his opening complaint from chapter 3, but this time Job’s words are tempered by having passed through the furnace of the three cycles of debate with his friends.<sup>6</sup> There are three main points in what follows. In chapter 29, Job recounts the days before his trial by ordeal began. In chapter 30, Job describes his present state, both his suffering and his humiliation. And then in Job 31, Job makes one more impassioned statement of his innocence. Obviously a number of people are listening to Job’s speech, including a certain Elihu.

Chapter 29 of Job is very poignant, given what Job once enjoyed in light of his current suffering. Job’s opening comments about the days in which he enjoyed God’s favor reiterate what was said of Job in the book’s prologue. *“Job continued his discourse: `How I long for the months gone by, for the days when God watched over me, when his lamp shone upon my head and by his light I walked through darkness! Oh, for the days when I was in my prime, when God’s intimate friendship blessed my house, when the Almighty was still with me and my children were around me, when my path was drenched with cream and the rock poured out for me streams of olive oil.”* We can imagine a nostalgic tone in Job’s voice and tears filling Job’s eyes as he looks back upon his life. He’s lost so much. His suffering is so great.

Given the fact that he now resides on the town dunghill and is an object of the scorn of all his neighbors, what follows beginning in verse 7 is especially moving. *“When I went to the gate of the city and took my seat in the public square, the young men saw me and stepped aside and the old men rose to their feet; the chief men refrained from speaking and covered their mouths with their hands; the voices of the nobles were hushed, and their tongues stuck to the roof of their mouths. Whoever heard me spoke well of me,*

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<sup>5</sup> Kline, “Job,” p. 480.

<sup>6</sup> Kline, “Job,” p. 480.

*and those who saw me commended me, because I rescued the poor who cried for help, and the fatherless who had none to assist him. The man who was dying blessed me; I made the widow's heart sing.*" The ultimate humiliation is that children now laugh at Job and people are grossed out by the sight of him.

Job's faith in the God of the promise was clearly manifest in his conduct. In verse 14, Job declares, "*I put on righteousness as my clothing; justice was my robe and my turban. I was eyes to the blind and feet to the lame. I was a father to the needy; I took up the case of the stranger. I broke the fangs of the wicked and snatched the victims from their teeth. . . . Men listened to me expectantly, waiting in silence for my counsel. After I had spoken, they spoke no more; my words fell gently on their ears. They waited for me as for showers and drank in my words as the spring rain. When I smiled at them, they scarcely believed it; the light of my face was precious to them. I chose the way for them and sat as their chief; I dwelt as a king among his troops; I was like one who comforts mourners.*" Job had done none of the things his friends had implied or accused him of doing. He was a blameless and upright man, who feared the Lord and shunned evil. Everyone knew it. The accusations made by his friends, who were trying to stir his conscience so that Job would repent of these supposed "sins," were nothing but cruel lies, and, no doubt, inflicted more pain than the open sores on his skin.

In chapter 30, Job describes his current predicament. The respect, honor and comfort of the past are now gone. That man whom everyone respected is now the lowest of the low—an object of shame and loathing. Says Job in the first 15 verses of chapter 30, "*But now they mock me, men younger than I, whose fathers I would have disdained to put with my sheep dogs. Of what use was the strength of their hands to me, since their vigor had gone from them? Haggard from want and hunger, they roamed the parched land in desolate wastelands at night. In the brush they gathered salt herbs, and their food was the root of the broom tree. They were banished from their fellow men, shouted at as if they were thieves. They were forced to live in the dry stream beds, among the rocks and in holes in the ground. . . . They detest me and keep their distance; they do not hesitate to spit in my face. Now that God has unstrung my bow and afflicted me, they throw off restraint in my presence. . . . Terrors overwhelm me; my dignity is driven away as by the wind, my safety vanishes like a cloud.*" Men who are regarded like dogs by polite society, now look down on Job. His present predicament and degree of suffering is almost beyond words.

But what is worse, Job feels as though he's been abandoned by God. In verses 16-23, Job cries out, "*and now my life ebbs away; days of suffering grip me. Night pierces my bones; my gnawing pains never rest. In his great power God becomes like clothing to me; he binds me like the neck of my garment. He throws me into the mud, and I am reduced to dust and ashes. I cry out to you, O God, but you do not answer; I stand up, but you merely look at me. You turn on me ruthlessly; with the might of your hand you attack me. You snatch me up and drive me before the wind; you toss me about in the storm. I know you will bring me down to death, to the place appointed for all the living.*" Job feels as though God is persecuting him. He also feels as though God has abandoned him during his time of greatest need. But what Job fails to grasp—and which will soon be revealed to him—is that he is on the verge of being guilty of the exact same thing as his three friends—he seeks wisdom through his own experience and observation. Yet we do need to cut Job some slack. As Kline reminds us, "it must be remembered that [Job] was not a man of stone but a man of flesh, and still being crushed by the serpent's coils."<sup>7</sup>

In verses 24-31, Job pours out his heart yet again. The very thought of his former life and his feeling so estranged from God moves Job deeply and he cries out in distress, "*Surely no one lays a hand on a*

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<sup>7</sup> Kline, "Job," p. 481.

*broken man when he cries for help in his distress. Have I not wept for those in trouble? Has not my soul grieved for the poor? Yet when I hoped for good, evil came; when I looked for light, then came darkness. The churning inside me never stops; days of suffering confront me. I go about blackened, but not by the sun; I stand up in the assembly and cry for help. I have become a brother of jackals, a companion of owls. My skin grows black and peels; my body burns with fever. My harp is tuned to mourning, and my flute to the sound of wailing.*" Sick with fever, and now singing the song of mourning, this sad lament probably indicates that Job thinks that his condition is irreversible, that death is at hand.

Despite the humiliation and sickness, what troubles Job the most is that he knows that he is innocent. Stirred deeply, Job again protests his innocence in his final speech. In chapter 31, we have what amounts to an oath of covenant allegiance. In such an oath, the speaker calls down the covenant curses upon himself, if it can be proved that he has violated any of the terms of the covenant. The literary form and style of Job 31 is quite similar to oaths sworn by Hittite soldiers to the effect, that if they failed in their duty (they panicked, they did not keep their ground or advance as ordered), their commander had the right to break their limbs or take their crops or wives. A number of the elements in Job's speech, the destruction of his crops, the breaking of his bones are found in these Hittite treaties.<sup>8</sup> This not only helps us understand the context of Job's lament, but points out that the Book of Job is historically accurate and quite ancient, coming from the time of Abraham and the patriarchs.

The context for what follows is covenantal, even though Job stands outside of the genealogical line of Abraham and the patriarchs. Job clearly regards himself as the covenant servant of the great king (YHWH). Job is protesting the fact that he has been faithful to all of the stipulations of the covenant and yet he's apparently receiving the covenant curses instead of the covenant blessings.<sup>9</sup> He cannot understand why this is happening to him. Since it is the great king's covenantal responsibility to keep up his end of the covenant, in this final speech Job is invoking a solemn covenant oath. In other words, Job is demanding that things be made right. He wants his sovereign to honor his covenant agreement.

In the first 8 verses of Job 31, Job flatly denies the kind of secret sins alluded to by his three friends. Says Job, "*I made a covenant with my eyes not to look lustfully at a girl. For what is man's lot from God above, his heritage from the Almighty on high? Is it not ruin for the wicked, disaster for those who do wrong? Does he not see my ways and count my every step? `If I have walked in falsehood or my foot has hurried after deceit-let God weigh me in honest scales and he will know that I am blameless-if my steps have turned from the path, if my heart has been led by my eyes, or if my hands have been defiled, then may others eat what I have sown, and may my crops be uprooted.*" This is covenantal language and Job is stating his innocence—not his sinlessness. The tension in Job's thinking is now brought out into the open. Job is terrified of the Lord's approach, while at the same time he is eager for his day in court. This dilemma can only be solved by the presence of a mediator, something Job hinted at earlier in the debate, but now seems to have forgotten.

In verses 9-23, Job appeals to his public conduct—very important if a crowd has gathered and has been listening to the speeches of Job's three friends and Job's responses. His neighbors know first-hand how Job has treated them, as well as his servants and the poor. Job confidently speaks in his defense. "*If my heart has been enticed by a woman, or if I have lurked at my neighbor's door, then may my wife grind*

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<sup>8</sup> Kline, "Job," p. 482.

<sup>9</sup> Kline, "Job," p. 482.

*another man's grain, and may other men sleep with her. For that would have been shameful, a sin to be judged. . . . `If I have denied justice to my menservants and maidservants when they had a grievance against me, what will I do when God confronts me? What will I answer when called to account? Did not he who made me in the womb make them? Did not the same one form us both within our mothers? `If I have denied the desires of the poor or let the eyes of the widow grow weary, if I have kept my bread to myself, not sharing it with the fatherless-but from my youth I reared him as would a father, and from my birth I guided the widow-if I have seen anyone perishing for lack of clothing, or a needy man without a garment, and his heart did not bless me for warming him with the fleece from my sheep, if I have raised my hand against the fatherless, knowing that I had influence in court, then let my arm fall from the shoulder, let it be broken off at the joint. For I dreaded destruction from God, and for fear of his splendor I could not do such things.”* Job’s conscience is clean, which explains why he invokes the covenant curses. He need not fear, if he is innocent. Job is a justified sinner whose conduct is blameless.

Then in verses 24-40, Job denies trusting in his wealth. He denies the hypocrisy of which he has been accused. He has not worshiped pagan “gods” nor has he treated people cruelly. Job needs not fear intense scrutiny of his life. He’s got nothing to hide. *“If I have put my trust in gold or said to pure gold, ‘You are my security,’ if I have rejoiced over my great wealth, the fortune my hands had gained, if I have regarded the sun in its radiance or the moon moving in splendor, so that my heart was secretly enticed and my hand offered them a kiss of homage, then these also would be sins to be judged, for I would have been unfaithful to God on high. `If I have rejoiced at my enemy's misfortune or gloated over the trouble that came to him-I have not allowed my mouth to sin by invoking a curse against his life-if the men of my household have never said, ‘Who has not had his fill of Job's meat?’- but no stranger had to spend the night in the street, for my door was always open to the traveler- if I have concealed my sin as men do, by hiding my guilt in my heart because I so feared the crowd and so dreaded the contempt of the clans that I kept silent and would not go outside. `Oh, that I had someone to hear me! I sign now my defense-let the Almighty answer me; let my accuser put his indictment in writing. Surely I would wear it on my shoulder, I would put it on like a crown. I would give him an account of my every step; like a prince I would approach him.) . . . The words of Job are ended.”*

To make the point that he is innocent to the terms of the covenant, Job demands a written defense. But Job also demands to appear before the Almighty as a Prince. Job may be innocent, but with these last words, something distressing has happened. Job is now thinking only of himself and has completely forgotten his quest for true wisdom. His complaint has become a tirade. He’s on the verge of becoming just like Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar.

Bold and defiant, Job has nearly crossed the line. He now stands before the Lord demanding to be treated like a prince. He is on the brink of self-righteousness. Job has offered a resounding defense of his innocence, something he has every right to do. But he now manifests a degree of arrogance which reflects that he too has much to learn, something which will soon be corrected—which is one of the purposes for the speech of Elihu, which follows in Job 32-37.

Having allowed Job to endure this Satanically-inspired trial by ordeal, God will rescue Job before it is too late. Job has endured so much and has still not blamed God. And so God sends Elihu to interrupt Job before he goes too far. But Elihu’s speech also prepares the way for God to give Job an answer to his question. Thus, it is an act of God’s grace when Job is silenced. When God speaks to Job from the whirlwind as recounted in Job 38-40:2, Job will be reminded of the words which began this speech. *“The fear of the Lord-that is wisdom, and to shun evil is understanding.”* These words are true and right. After the Lord appears to Job, Job will indeed fear God. And then and only then, will Job receive the

answer and vindication he's been seeking! He will fear God, shun evil and then gain that wisdom and understanding he's been so desperately seeking. And because God is good and just, he will indeed vindicate and restore his suffering servant, Job.

## “The Almighty Gives Him Understanding”

*Texts: Job 32:1-37:24; 1 Corinthians 2:6-16*

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One of the ways in which God demonstrates his graciousness to us is when he restrains our own inherent sinfulness. Sometimes this happens when God reveals to us the error of our ways so that we repent, before we go too far. This is the case in Job chapters 31-32, when Job’s speech comes to an end and Elihu’s speech now begins. In his closing response to his three friends, Job passionately defends his honor. Despite the allegations and innuendos made by his three friends that Job had sinned, which in their minds explains why he is suffering so greatly, Job knows that he has done nothing to bring down God’s covenant curses. Thus Job demands to be vindicated before God. And while Job has not sinned as Satan has predicted that he would—Satan believed that Job would blame God for his suffering and then curse God to his face—Job now comes perilously close to the edge of self-righteousness. While Job does not blame God for his circumstances, in the course of seeking his own vindication, Job has become defiant. His speech has become careless and he has lost proper perspective on his suffering. Because he is gracious toward Job, and even though Job cannot yet see it, God will humble him before he goes any farther. Job has successfully passed his ordeal. God will soon restore him and vindicate his good name. Things will work out in the end because God is good and always keeps his promises. But first, Job will be humbled. He will be humbled because God is being gracious with his righteous servant.

We now move into the concluding section of this book, where Job gets the very thing he’s been demanding—an audience with God. Yes, Job will be vindicated in the end. Yes, he will get an answer to his questions about the suffering of the righteous. It may not be the answer he wants or expects, but it will be an answer nonetheless. But before the happy ending to the story comes about, God will appear to Job from the midst of the whirlwind, bringing this amazing story to a close. Job will learn that true wisdom is to be found in the person and work of Jesus Christ, who is the wisdom of God incarnate. But before God speaks, a forerunner must come and prepare the way for the Lord.

At the end of Job’s final discourse, Job uttered the words recorded in Job 31:35-37: *“Oh, that I had someone to hear me! I sign now my defense—let the Almighty answer me; let my accuser put his indictment in writing. Surely I would wear it on my shoulder, I would put it on like a crown. I would give him an account of my every step; like a prince I would approach him.”* Job has been the recipient of suffering through this divinely-ordained trial by ordeal. Job has endured the loss of everything, all of his possessions, all of his children, and even his good reputation. What is more, Job has received terrible counsel from his friends which inflicted more pain, perhaps, than the sores on his body. As the debate unfolds throughout chapters 4-31, Job’s friends cannot deal with the obvious—the righteous do indeed suffer and the wicked often prosper. In fact, by the time the debate has come to end, Job has gone from being the one receiving terrible theological advice to becoming the teacher of those who seek true wisdom. As we have seen, Job has silenced his friends. But even though he is right, the whole process has embittered him and although he seeks true wisdom from God, he has become careless and has lost sight of the most important thing—that God’s ways are always true and right and that Job’s final vindication can only take place once he is reminded of God’s perfect righteousness.

Having graduated from the school of suffering, and sensing that what is truly necessary to bridge the gap between the mystery of suffering and true wisdom is a divine mediator, Job is still a sinner. As such, he is about to cross the line in terms of his relationship with God. Job has fulfilled the specific terms of his trial by ordeal—he has not blamed God for his troubles after his possessions and family had been taken from him. Job is a justified sinner whose upright and blameless life reflects his faith in the God of the promise. But even though he is justified from sin’s guilt and even though he has been liberated from sin’s power, Job remains a sinner. It is one thing for Job to demand that God vindicate him from the charges that he has sinned so as to provoke God’s wrath, when, in fact, he has not. But it is another thing to demand that YHWH treat him like a prince because of what he has just endured. Job is now on the verge of becoming utterly self-righteous and demanding in his dealings with God, and God in his grace, is about to humble Job, before he crosses the line and says something he ought not say.

**E**nter Elihu. The way in which God restrains Job’s sin is quite remarkable in its own right as seen in the lengthy speech of a certain Elihu, who has, apparently, overheard the entire dialogue between Job and his three friends and who can restrain himself no more.

Like Job and his three friends, Elihu does not have the benefit of having read the prologue of the book, so he too knows nothing of the true nature of Job’s trial by ordeal. He does not have all the information needed to assess Job’s situation accurately. But Elihu does see that God has been gracious to Job despite Job’s harsh words about feeling abandoned by God and Elihu’s speech (wordy and repetitive) serves to prepare the way for the coming of the Lord in the whirlwind.<sup>1</sup> Four times in what follows, we will read that Elihu was angry with all four of the participants. In Elihu’s estimation, Job and his friends are wide of the mark when it comes to the matter of Job’s suffering. Job has erred on the side of self-justification. He has lost sight of God’s righteous dealings with all of his creatures, even when they suffer. But Job’s friends also err by condemning Job personally and accusing him of sin because of their faulty understanding of the principle of divine retribution and their cruel application of it to Job. They have not been able to offer any resolution to the mystery of the suffering of the righteous. Job has silenced them.

In terms of the literary structure of the book, Elihu gives us the perspective of a pious believer on what has just happened between Job and his friends. More importantly, Elihu’s speech sets the stage for the Lord himself to speak in chapters 38-39, when we get God’s perspective on this whole debate.<sup>2</sup> Keeping this in mind, we now turn to the speech of Elihu beginning in Job 32:1. The four debaters have run out of steam and the debate has come to an end and so we read in verse 1, “*so these three men stopped answering Job, because he was righteous in his own eyes.*” How can you argue with someone who thinks he is right and refuses to be swayed by anything that is said? In verse 2, we are introduced to Elihu. “*But Elihu son of Barakel the Buzite, of the family of Ram, became very angry with Job for justifying himself rather than God.*” Elihu’s problem with Job is that Job was not nearly as worried about God’s honor as he was with his own. The last speech in which Job referred to himself as a prince who deserves to be treated as such by YHWH, clearly provokes the young man to enter the fray.

But Elihu’s anger is not only directed at Job, it is also directed at his three friends (Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar) as well. In verse 3, we read, “[Elihu] *was also angry with the three friends, because they had found no way to refute Job, and yet had condemned him.*” The main point Job offered in his defense has

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<sup>1</sup> Kline, “Job,” p. 483.

<sup>2</sup> Andersen, Job, p. 51.

gone unchallenged. The righteous do suffer in this life while the wicked do indeed prosper. The erroneous application of the principle of divine retribution on the part of Job's friends—that God must punish the wicked in such a way that they always live miserable lives and die young—clearly does not sit well with Elihu. It is self-evidently not true, and coupled with the fact that Job's friends were forced to accuse Job of sins he did not commit so as to validate their point, their actions were shameful and did nothing to further our understanding of divine justice. It is no wonder that Job would not budge!

There is a reason as to why Elihu has waited so long to speak his mind. *“Now Elihu had waited before speaking to Job because they were older than he. But when he saw that the three men had nothing more to say, his anger was aroused.”* In the ancient world, age was associated with wisdom. So Elihu was duty bound to keep his thoughts to himself until he was asked to speak by his elders. But with the dialogue at a standstill and with nothing resolved, we read in verse 6. *“So Elihu son of Barakel the Buzite said: I am young in years, and you are old; that is why I was fearful, not daring to tell you what I know.”* But once having dared to speak, Elihu will have his say in full measure.

His speech begins in verse 7. *“I thought, 'Age should speak; advanced years should teach wisdom.' But it is the spirit in a man, the breath of the Almighty, that gives him understanding.”* Elihu understands that age and life experience may be one source of wisdom, but all true wisdom ultimately comes from God, which, Elihu understands to come in the form of the spirit of life God breathes into man.<sup>3</sup> While Elihu correctly points out that wisdom must come from God, he does not yet understand the role of the Holy Spirit, and the self-revelation of God in his word, which is the true and final source of all wisdom.

This is a point that Paul will later make clear in his first letter to the church in Corinth, when he wrote about the person and work of the Holy Spirit in 1 Corinthians 2:6-16, *“We do, however, speak a message of wisdom among the mature, but not the wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. No, we speak of God's secret wisdom, a wisdom that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began. None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. However, as it is written: "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him" -- but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit. . . . We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us. This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words. The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned. The spiritual man makes judgments about all things, but he himself is not subject to any man's judgment: `For who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct him?' But we have the mind of Christ.”*

While Paul is indwelt by the Holy Spirit and has the mind of Christ—i.e. and therefore possesses true wisdom about spiritual things—Elihu, at this early stage of redemptive history only knows that such wisdom is needed. He knows that true wisdom must come from God and that the performances he has just witnessed on the part of Job's three friends, clearly indicates that despite their age and preeminent social standing, they do not possess the kind of wisdom that Elihu sees is needed. Thus Elihu has correctly diagnosed the problem—men and women need wisdom from God to understand human suffering and that human experience and opinion are poor substitutes. But he cannot yet fully understand that such wisdom will come through God's revelation of himself in his word. That point will soon become clear

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<sup>3</sup> Kline, “Job,” p. 483.

enough when God speaks from the midst of the whirlwind. When God speaks, true wisdom is revealed.

And so Elihu's quest for wisdom frames the following as we read in verses 9-22 when Elihu takes up this quest in earnest. *"It is not only the old who are wise, not only the aged who understand what is right. Therefore I say: Listen to me; I too will tell you what I know. I waited while you spoke, I listened to your reasoning; while you were searching for words, I gave you my full attention. But not one of you has proved Job wrong; none of you has answered his arguments. Do not say, 'We have found wisdom; let God refute him, not man.' But Job has not marshaled his words against me, and I will not answer him with your arguments. They are dismayed and have no more to say; words have failed them. Must I wait, now that they are silent, now that they stand there with no reply? I too will have my say; I too will tell what I know. For I am full of words, and the spirit within me compels me; inside I am like bottled-up wine, like new wineskins ready to burst. I must speak and find relief; I must open my lips and reply. I will show partiality to no one, nor will I flatter any man; for if I were skilled in flattery, my Maker would soon take me away."* Having made his case to be heard by Job and the older men (Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar), Elihu now addresses his comments specifically to Job.

In the first 7 verses of Job 33, Elihu extends a challenge of sorts to Job. *"But now, Job, listen to my words; pay attention to everything I say. I am about to open my mouth; my words are on the tip of my tongue. My words come from an upright heart; my lips sincerely speak what I know. The Spirit of God has made me; the breath of the Almighty gives me life. Answer me then, if you can; prepare yourself and confront me. I am just like you before God; I too have been taken from clay. No fear of me should alarm you, nor should my hand be heavy upon you."* Repeatedly, Job had demanded a trial before God, but then complained that such a trial would overwhelm him. Now Elihu calls Job's bluff. Let Job argue his case with another mere mortal. Let Job respond to Elihu's arguments. In effect, what Elihu is saying is, "You want a trial, Job—I'll give you a trial!"

In verses 8-11 Elihu does his best to summarize Job's main point. *"But you have said in my hearing-I heard the very words-I am pure and without sin; I am clean and free from guilt. Yet God has found fault with me; he considers me his enemy. He fastens my feet in shackles; he keeps close watch on all my paths."* Yes, Job is innocent, in the sense that he has not sinned as his friends have accused him. But Job is still a sinner—a justified sinner—but a sinner nonetheless. In the process of protesting his innocence and demanding vindication, Job's righteous anger and indignation (not wrong in themselves) have become conceit, which according to one writer is "incredibly bald and arrogant [as seen] in Job's final words".<sup>4</sup> It is one thing to defend your conduct. It is another to demand your rights, especially when, as a sinner, Job has only those rights given to him by a gracious God in the first place! Elihu now points this out.

Thus in verses 12-30, Elihu takes issue with Job, rebuking Job for not taking sufficient account of the need to defend God's honor, and not his own. *"But I tell you, in this you are not right, for God is greater than man. Why do you complain to him that he answers none of man's words?"* Not only does Elihu acknowledge the need for divine revelation, he begins his explanation as to why the righteous suffer—divine chastisement. *"For God does speak—now one way, now another—though man may not perceive it. In a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falls on men as they slumber in their beds, he may speak in their ears and terrify them with warnings, to turn man from wrongdoing and keep him from pride, to preserve his soul from the pit, his life from perishing by the sword. Or a man may be chastened on a bed of pain with constant distress in his bones, so that his very being finds food repulsive*

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<sup>4</sup> Kline, "Job," p. 483.

*and his soul loathes the choicest meal. His flesh wastes away to nothing, and his bones, once hidden, now stick out. His soul draws near to the pit, and his life to the messengers of death.”*

Even while people live under the sentence of death because of sin, God does not abandon them. God is being gracious to his people by delivering them from the pit, even when they are in the midst of the depths of despair. There are times when God chastens his people to deliver them. *“Yet if there is an angel on his side as a mediator, one out of a thousand, to tell a man what is right for him, to be gracious to him and say, ‘Spare him from going down to the pit; I have found a ransom for him’-then his flesh is renewed like a child’s; it is restored as in the days of his youth. He prays to God and finds favor with him, he sees God’s face and shouts for joy; he is restored by God to his righteous state. Then he comes to men and says, ‘I sinned, and perverted what was right, but I did not get what I deserved. He redeemed my soul from going down to the pit, and I will live to enjoy the light.’ ‘God does all these things to a man-twice, even three times- to turn back his soul from the pit, that the light of life may shine on him.”*

As Elihu sees it, one reason why the righteous suffer is because this is one of God’s ways to chasten his servants, so as to rescue those living under the shadow of death. Eliphaz had also brought up the idea of chastening with Job, but Eliphaz believed that the degree of chastening was in direct proportion to the degree of someone’s sin—this is why he was forced to accuse Job of having sinned, because Job’s suffering was so great. Elihu, on the other hand, sees suffering and chastisement as an act of God’s grace. God chastises his own, which means that suffering can be a sign of God’s favor. According to Elihu, God chastens those he loves as a means of drawing them to himself, especially when they come near the pit, (i.e., come near to destruction). Thus Elihu can correctly point out that there is no automatic relationship between suffering and someone’s sin. This also explains why the suffering of the righteous seems so arbitrary to us. We do not always know what God’s purposes are and why some are chastened and others are not. Elihu has succeeded in taking the sting out of the suffering of the righteous and the mystery of the prosperity of the unrighteous.

In verses 31-33, Elihu applies his understanding of this point directly to Job. *“Pay attention, Job, and listen to me; be silent, and I will speak. If you have anything to say, answer me; speak up, for I want you to be cleared. But if not, then listen to me; be silent, and I will teach you wisdom.”* We can fill in the gap and assume that Job was both blessed by what Elihu had to say, and yet given Job’s silence, he must have also become aware that many of the things he said in his defense were uttered in self-righteousness and that he did not acknowledge that God had been gracious to him, even in the midst of his pain. Job is probably relieved to hear Elihu’s point, and yet at the same time, convicted of his sinfulness.

Since the next part of Elihu’s speech (found in Job 34) is repetitive, we skip to verses 10-28, but where Elihu addresses the subject of God’s righteousness. Since Job has been insisting that he is righteous, how about considering God’s righteousness first? That will put Job’s situation, as well as the false understanding of God’s retributive justice on the part of his friends, in their proper perspectives. In verse 10 Elihu asks the debaters, *“So listen to me, you men of understanding. Far be it from God to do evil, from the Almighty to do wrong. He repays a man for what he has done; he brings upon him what his conduct deserves. It is unthinkable that God would do wrong, that the Almighty would pervert justice.”* Yes, God must punish sin, but will do so in his own time and ways. God is sovereign *“Who appointed him over the earth? Who put him in charge of the whole world? If it were his intention and he withdrew his spirit and breath, all mankind would perish together and man would return to the dust. ‘If you have understanding, hear this; listen to what I say. Can he who hates justice govern? Will you condemn the just and mighty One? Is he not the One who says to kings, ‘You are worthless,’ and to nobles, ‘You are wicked,’ who shows no partiality to princes and does not favor the rich over the poor, for they are all the*

*work of his hands? They die in an instant, in the middle of the night; the people are shaken and they pass away; the mighty are removed without human hand. `His eyes are on the ways of men; he sees their every step. There is no dark place, no deep shadow, where evildoers can hide. God has no need to examine men further, that they should come before him for judgment. Without inquiry he shatters the mighty and sets up others in their place. Because he takes note of their deeds, he overthrows them in the night and they are crushed. He punishes them for their wickedness where everyone can see them, because they turned from following him and had no regard for any of his ways. They caused the cry of the poor to come before him, so that he heard the cry of the needy.”* God gives all life. God judges with perfect righteousness. He knows all the facts. He does nothing capriciously or improperly. Job needs to consider this matter carefully, since he claims to believe this, as do his friends.

To even question God’s goodness is folly. In verse 29 Elihu asks, “*But if he remains silent, who can condemn him? If he hides his face, who can see him? Yet he is over man and nation alike, to keep a godless man from ruling, from laying snares for the people. `Suppose a man says to God, ‘I am guilty but will offend no more. Teach me what I cannot see; if I have done wrong, I will not do so again.’ Should God then reward you on your terms, when you refuse to repent? You must decide, not I; so tell me what you know. `Men of understanding declare, wise men who hear me say to me, ‘Job speaks without knowledge; his words lack insight.’ Oh, that Job might be tested to the utmost for answering like a wicked man! To his sin he adds rebellion; scornfully he claps his hands among us and multiplies his words against God.”* Notice that Job remains silent. He does not reply. He realizes he may have said too much and overstated his case. His words come close to sounding like those of an angry pagan.

In the opening words of chapter 35, Elihu continues to speak to Job, asking him to think about his charge that God has not vindicated him. “*Then Elihu said: `Do you think this is just? You say, ‘I will be cleared by God.’ Yet you ask him, ‘What profit is it to me, and what do I gain by not sinning?’ `I would like to reply to you and to your friends with you. Look up at the heavens and see; gaze at the clouds so high above you. If you sin, how does that affect him? If your sins are many, what does that do to him? If you are righteous, what do you give to him, or what does he receive from your hand? Your wickedness affects only a man like yourself, and your righteousness only the sons of men. `Men cry out under a load of oppression; they plead for relief from the arm of the powerful. But no one says, ‘Where is God my Maker, who gives songs in the night, who teaches more to us than to the beasts of the earth and makes us wiser than the birds of the air?’ He does not answer when men cry out because of the arrogance of the wicked. Indeed, God does not listen to their empty plea; the Almighty pays no attention to it. How much less, then, will he listen when you say that you do not see him, that your case is before him and you must wait for him, and further, that his anger never punishes and he does not take the least notice of wickedness. So Job opens his mouth with empty talk; without knowledge he multiplies words.”*

Job’s problem is not that God is indifferent to his people, but that his people are indifferent to him. They do not seek God because of who he is, but they only turn to him in times of trial, when they want or need something. With these words, Elihu summons Job back to his original words of faith, recorded in Job 1:21, “*the Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised.*”<sup>5</sup> Yes, Job has suffered much, but he needs to be careful and not allow himself to be carried away with self-righteousness. To do anything else is to abandon the quest for true wisdom.

In chapters 36-37, Elihu initially returns to the theme of the suffering of the righteous, reminding Job that

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<sup>5</sup> Kline, “Job,” p. 485.

God is gracious to us, even when we suffer. In verses 5 and following, Elihu declares, *“God is mighty, but does not despise men; he is mighty, and firm in his purpose. He does not keep the wicked alive but gives the afflicted their rights. He does not take his eyes off the righteous; he enthrones them with kings and exalts them forever. But if men are bound in chains, held fast by cords of affliction, he tells them what they have done—that they have sinned arrogantly. He makes them listen to correction and commands them to repent of their evil. If they obey and serve him, they will spend the rest of their days in prosperity and their years in contentment. But if they do not listen, they will perish by the sword and die without knowledge.”* In the dim light of the early stages of redemptive history before the coming of Christ, Elihu believes that the righteous suffer, not because they have committed some particular sin, but because the Lord is correcting them, teaching them, restraining them, given their inherent sinfulness. God owes them nothing, but graciously gives them life. What is more, God has promised to reward all the graduates of the school of suffering in the end. His promise—they will be enthroned with kings!

But in verse 13, Elihu discusses how God’s sovereignty is seen by unbelievers. *“The godless in heart harbor resentment; even when he fetters them, they do not cry for help. They die in their youth, among male prostitutes of the shrines.”* But for believers it is different. *“those who suffer he delivers in their suffering; he speaks to them in their affliction. He is wooing you from the jaws of distress to a spacious place free from restriction, to the comfort of your table laden with choice food.”* Job needs to see how he has become embittered and proud, and sounds just like the unbelievers to whom Elihu has just referred. *“But now you are laden with the judgment due the wicked; judgment and justice have taken hold of you.”*

Having considered the greatness of God’s purposes, throughout the balance of chapters 36 and 37, Elihu is moved to praise God for all his goodness, seen throughout the glories of creation. *“God is exalted in his power. Who is a teacher like him? Who has prescribed his ways for him, or said to him, ‘You have done wrong’? Remember to extol his work, which men have praised in song. All mankind has seen it; men gaze on it from afar. How great is God—beyond our understanding! The number of his years is past finding out. He draws up the drops of water, which distill as rain to the streams; the clouds pour down their moisture and abundant showers fall on mankind. Who can understand how he spreads out the clouds, how he thunders from his pavilion? See how he scatters his lightning about him, bathing the depths of the sea. This is the way he governs the nations and provides food in abundance.”* Elihu has no idea that he is speaking not only as a worshiper of YHWH, but as a prophet as well. Elihu is about to hear the very thing he has been trying to describe through his words of praise—the voice of God. And without knowing it, he has prepared the way for the coming of the Lord in the whirlwind.

In chapter 37, Elihu continues to praise YHWH. He has no idea of what is about to happen. *“At this my heart pounds and leaps from its place. Listen! Listen to the roar of his voice, to the rumbling that comes from his mouth. He unleashes his lightning beneath the whole heaven and sends it to the ends of the earth. After that comes the sound of his roar; he thunders with his majestic voice. When his voice resounds, he holds nothing back. God’s voice thunders in marvelous ways; he does great things beyond our understanding.”* Continuing his praise of the Almighty, we skip ahead to verses 20-24 and the end of Elihu’s discourse. *“Should he be told that I want to speak? Would any man ask to be swallowed up? Now no one can look at the sun, bright as it is in the skies after the wind has swept them clean. Out of the north he comes in golden splendor; God comes in awesome majesty. The Almighty is beyond our reach and exalted in power; in his justice and great righteousness, he does not oppress. Therefore, men revere him, for does he not have regard for all the wise in heart?”* Elihu’s speech now ends. He has directed Job back to where he started—the gracious and sovereign God. Elihu has also prepared the way for the Lord. For the next words we read in Job in 38:1 are *“Then the LORD answered Job out of the storm.”* Everyone has spoken. Job, Bildad, Eliphaz, Zophar and Elihu have all had their say. Now the

Lord will come and speak and whole the earth will be silent! Here is the wisdom all have been seeking. For the suffering and obedience of Job points us ahead to the doing and dying of the man of sorrows, the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the very wisdom of God incarnate. In him, we find all that we need, including the resolution to the mystery of suffering and the revelation of the saving purposes of God. Amen!

## “Will the One Who Contends With the Almighty Correct Him?”

*Texts: Job 38:1-42:6; Hebrews 12:18-29*

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**E**liphaz, Bildad, and Zophar have had their say. So has Job. So has Elihu. Now Job will get the very thing he has been demanding—an audience before God. But when God speaks to Job, things will be much different from what Job has been expecting. There will be no formal indictment with charges for Job to answer. Nor will the Lord give Job a detailed response to his list of questions nor respond to Job’s specious charges that YHWH has not treated him fairly. Instead, God will cross-examine Job through a series of questions designed to teach Job true wisdom. And in the end, Job not only will be much wiser, he will be humbled, while yet at the same time assured of God’s favor toward him, even in the midst of his trial by ordeal, which blessedly comes to an end.

We move to the climax to the Book of Job, when God speaks to Job from the midst of a whirlwind. At long last we get an answer to the question which has dominated this entire story so far—why do the righteous suffer? More specifically, why does Job suffer? The answer Job receives from God is not one Job expects nor even necessarily likes. In fact, some would not consider God’s words to Job an answer at all. For in Job 38-42 we discover what God means when he says in Isaiah 55:8, “*my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,*” and in Psalm 145:3 and Isaiah 40:28 when we read that God’s “*greatness no one can fathom.*” In our weakness, God condescends to teach Job that God’s thoughts, ways and greatness transcend anything humans think or imagine. As a result, Job will be thoroughly humbled and transformed in his thinking before, in his grace, God restores to Job all those things which had been taken from him during his trial by ordeal, which is now blessedly completed.

As the final section of the Book of Job unfolds, we need to notice that God’s appearance to Job is an act of grace. Instead of coming to Job in judgment and confronting him with a list of his sins or even rebuking him for his thoughtless questions, God takes him to the school of Wisdom—where the primary entrance requirement is a diploma from the school of suffering, which Job has now graduated. The Lord will teach Job true wisdom through a series of rhetorical questions, a process designed to remind Job that the creator and sustainer of all things has graciously drawn near and speaks to him about the nature of the world and his Lordship over every inch of all of that he has made.

Yes, God is still on his throne despite all that has happened to Job and despite Job’s fear that he’s been abandoned. Since the God who created all things and rules and governs them now graciously appears to Job from the midst of the storm, Job is instantly assured that everything is okay, despite his present circumstances. Knowing that God is not angry at him, it no longer really matters to Job what will happen, since the very presence of God assures Job that all is well and puts all things—even his suffering—into proper perspective.<sup>1</sup>

Lest we forget, God has been graciously preparing Job for this transforming moment all along. Job has

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<sup>1</sup> Andersen, *Job*, p. 269.

come to see that none of his three friends possessed true wisdom. It could be said (and probably should be said) that these three well-intended doofuses (doofi) only darkened the way of understanding. Job's ability to quickly silence them showed that he was on the right track, but his increasing pride and conceit in his effort to vindicate himself showed that he too was not yet ready to receive true wisdom. It was not until the speech from Elihu that Job began to realize that he had gone too far in his demands to be vindicated. It is Elihu, who by humbling Job, actually prepares the way for the Lord to come and speak to Job from the midst of the whirlwind. Given all that Job had been through, without such preparation, he surely would have been overwhelmed by the Lord's approach. Now Job is simultaneously humbled and yet completely assured of God's favor.

We also need to keep in mind the nature of the events revealed in the prologue (chapters 1 and 2). It was the Lord himself who summoned Satan and called his attention to the Lord's righteous servant, Job. So now God comes to Job, also in the form of a challenge, this time through a series of rhetorical questions. The irony in all of this is that God confronts both Job and Satan with his wondrous works. Job himself is that work of divine grace through which God challenges Satan—"see my righteous servant Job? There is no one else like him on all the earth." God's challenge to Job to consider his wondrous works is the means by which God's work of redemption will be perfected in Job. This enables the righteous servant to triumph over the Devil through his trial by ordeal.<sup>2</sup> In the end, Job will bow his knee before his creator and praise his name. He will not curse God as Satan had predicted. And he will learn true wisdom.

Job's ordeal also prefigures the coming of Jesus Christ, who will be truly righteous and perfectly obedient, who will finally and totally defeat Satan when he too is afflicted with grief at the hands of sinful men and women. Throughout the Book of Job, we find a fundamental truth of redemptive history being set forth in type and shadow—someone must fulfill all righteousness and then offer a full and complete satisfaction for human sin in order to undo the works of the Devil. Job's obedience does so in a very limited and provisional way. But the suffering Job, who struggles to find wisdom, becomes a type of the greater Job, Jesus Christ, who is the wisdom of God incarnate.

**I**n Job 38:1-40:2, God delivers his first challenge to Job, followed by Job's response in 40:3-5, which, in turn, is immediately followed by a second challenge in Job 40:6-41:24. We now turn to YHWH's first speech to Job beginning in Job 38:1.

The story of Job has been building to this dramatic moment from chapter 4 on. We have heard the three cycles of cruel speeches from Job's friends, who because of their faulty understanding of the principle of divine retribution, accused Job of having sinned. We have also heard Job's heartfelt complaint in chapter 3, along with the responses to his three friends and then the increasingly defiant and self-righteous speeches from Job in chapters 26-31. Finally, Elihu speaks as prophet and, in effect, prepares the way for the coming of the Lord. Then, in Job 37:1-2 Elihu declared, "*at this my heart pounds and leaps from its place. Listen! Listen to the roar of his voice, to the rumbling that comes from his mouth,*" before spending two full chapters (Job 36-37) offering heartfelt praise to God for all of his glorious works. When Elihu comes to the end of his speech, we read in Job 38:1, "*Then the LORD answered Job out of the storm.*" The way has been prepared for the Lord to come. The human quest for wisdom has come to a pitiful end. The Lord instructs Job in the way of wisdom and Job will never be the same.

Whenever there is an appearance of YHWH in the Old Testament (a theophany), it is always

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<sup>2</sup> Kline, "Job," p. 486.

accompanied by physical manifestations, in this case a “storm” (NIV) (cf. Psalm 18:7 ff; 50:3; Ezekiel 1:4, 28, Nahum 1:3, Habakkuk 3 and Zechariah 9:14). It is with these images in mind that the author of Hebrews, speaks of God as a consuming fire (cf. Hebrews 12:29). Such upheaval in the natural order not only indicates the presence of the Lord, it illustrates the significance and importance of the divine revelation which was about to follow.<sup>3</sup> Let us not forget that it was also a windstorm which took the lives of Job’s children, so the reference to the storm is perhaps intended to remind the reader that nothing comes to pass apart from the will of the Lord—even windstorms which take the lives of those we love.

In verses 2-3, the Lord issues a challenge to Job. “*Who is this that darkens my counsel with words without knowledge? Brace yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer me.*” Since we read in Job 42:7 that Job spoke correctly about the Lord throughout his ordeal, the Lord’s rebuke of Job is based on the fact that Job spoke of things he did not know. Job spoke in ignorance about the plans (counsel) of God. The creature has no right whatsoever to criticize the Creator, especially when the creature can only speak from ignorance about the mysterious ways of the sovereign God.

The Lord’s command for Job to brace himself like a man is an image taken directly from the ancient sport of belt-wrestling in which the winner was able to either remove his opponent’s belt, or else give his opponent such a massive wedgie that they were forced into submission. This was not only an athletic image (the idea of a contest or fete of strength), but grabbing someone’s belt was also the means of subduing them in a court of law or upon capture.<sup>4</sup> As a sign of ordeal, the implication is clear—Job’s trial by ordeal is about to be resolved. YHWH will subdue Job, not to punish him, but as a means of ending the ordeal by teaching Job that which he has been seeking—true wisdom.

We need to be clear that this contest is not merely about God’s power or sheer strength. The issue is not that God is bigger than Job and like a bully can do whatever he wants. God does not belittle Job, given his greatness and Job’s contrasting finitude. Job is not crushed nor consumed by God’s greatness. But he is humbled. There is a big difference. The contest between God and Job centers in the revelation of divine wisdom, not in power for power’s sake.<sup>5</sup> God’s wisdom is presented as that of a skilled craftsman. God’s wisdom is displayed on earth, in the heavens, and in the animal kingdom as seen in the mention of creatures who are beyond human control, but who are God’s pets.<sup>6</sup> While Job is not consumed by God’s greatness, Job does become fully aware of how truly great God is and how sinful and weak men and women truly are.<sup>7</sup> God will now give to Job the very thing he lacks—wisdom. Such wisdom enables Job to accept the ways and purposes of God, whatever they may be, even in the midst of suffering.

Because the ordeal centers in a test of wisdom, the Lord asks Job a series of questions designed to show Job his spatial and temporal limitations. Job will live out the average span of a human life. He can only be in one place at a time and can only understand a small fraction of what he observes. His inherent

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<sup>3</sup> Kline, “Job,” p. 486.

<sup>4</sup> Kline, “Job,” p. 486.

<sup>5</sup> Kline, “Job,” p. 487; Andersen, *Job*, pp. 268-272.

<sup>6</sup> Andersen, *Job*, p. 273.

<sup>7</sup> Kline, “Job,” p. 487.

sinfulness causes him to see things in a self-centered and distorted way. Job, in other words, is a sinful human. But God is not bound by space or by time. He is perfectly Holy, just and righteous in all his doings. Reminding Job of this is the point of this series of questions—which are surely not intended to offer a scientific explanation of origins,<sup>8</sup> but which are designed to point out that Job was nowhere to be found when God created the heavens and the earth. *“Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation? Tell me, if you understand. Who marked off its dimensions? Surely you know! Who stretched a measuring line across it? On what were its footings set, or who laid its cornerstone- while the morning stars sang together and all the angels shouted for joy?”* Job was nonexistent when God created the earth. God is without beginning or end and predates the earth by countless (endless) ages.

The same thing holds true of the sea (v. 8–11). *“Who shut up the sea behind doors when it burst forth from the womb, when I made the clouds its garment and wrapped it in thick darkness, when I fixed limits for it and set its doors and bars in place, when I said, ‘This far you may come and no farther; here is where your proud waves halt?’”* Even the seas with all their storm and tempest obey their creator—men and women are helpless to control the ocean. Furthermore YHWH sets the day and night in place, as we see in verses 12-15. *“Have you ever given orders to the morning, or shown the dawn its place, that it might take the earth by the edges and shake the wicked out of it? The earth takes shape like clay under a seal; its features stand out like those of a garment. The wicked are denied their light, and their upraised arm is broken.”* Job must rise with the sun and sleep when it sets. But the Lord creates both the day and the night and has never slumbered, nor ever been sleepy.

The limits of human existence become clear in verses 16-18 when the Lord says to Job. *“Have you journeyed to the springs of the sea or walked in the recesses of the deep? Have the gates of death been shown to you? Have you seen the gates of the shadow of death? Have you comprehended the vast expanses of the earth? Tell me, if you know all this.”* No, Job does not know any of these things. He is bound to one place. He will live and die at a particular time. Not so with the LORD, who does all of the things which he now asks Job in verses 19-21. *“What is the way to the abode of light? And where does darkness reside? Can you take them to their places? Do you know the paths to their dwellings? Surely you know, for you were already born! You have lived so many years!”* In the creation account, God separates the light from the darkness. But Job was nowhere to be seen when God did this. It is important to notice that God is not ridiculing Job, although it is easy take these words as such. As one writer reminds us, it is not unkind nor sarcastic when God reminds a creature of his limitations, “to let God be God”.<sup>9</sup> God is not showing Job up. But he is reminding Job of the difference between a creature and the Creator and understanding this Creator-creature distinction is the beginning of wisdom.

Now the student (Job) is taken beyond day and night to the weather and to the heavenly bodies. As we learn in the creation account, the God who rules over heaven and earth rules them because he has created them. Yet Job has no control over these things whatsoever. Beginning in verse 22, the Lord asks Job, *“Have you entered the storehouses of the snow or seen the storehouses of the hail, which I reserve for times of trouble, for days of war and battle? What is the way to the place where the lightning is dispersed, or the place where the east winds are scattered over the earth? Who cuts a channel for the torrents of rain, and a path for the thunderstorm, to water a land where no man lives, a desert with no one in it, to satisfy a desolate wasteland and make it sprout with grass? Does the rain have a father?*

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<sup>8</sup> Andersen, *Job*, p. 274.

<sup>9</sup> Andersen, *Job*, p. 277.

*Who fathers the drops of dew? From whose womb comes the ice? Who gives birth to the frost from the heavens when the waters become hard as stone, when the surface of the deep is frozen? `Can you bind the beautiful Pleiades? Can you loose the cords of Orion? Can you bring forth the constellations in their seasons or lead out the Bear with its cubs? Do you know the laws of the heavens? Can you set up God's dominion over the earth? `Can you raise your voice to the clouds and cover yourself with a flood of water? Do you send the lightning bolts on their way? Do they report to you, 'Here we are'? Who endowed the heart with wisdom or gave understanding to the mind? Who has the wisdom to count the clouds? Who can tip over the water jars of the heavens when the dust becomes hard and the clods of earth stick together?`* No, Job cannot speak to lightening and Job has not hung the constellations in space. Lightening is the Lord's servant. The Lord spoke and the constellations came to be.

At the end of chapter 38 and continuing on throughout chapter 39, the focus shifts to the animal kingdom. Job is not in any sense able to govern or rule the creatures God has made. While man was given dominion over the animals in Eden, this dominion was lost after the fall of the human race into sin. The point is that Job cannot possibly know the extent of animal activity, nor can he in any sense control the ways of creatures. Job has not set their boundaries nor established their domains. In Job 38:39, we read, *“Do you hunt the prey for the lioness and satisfy the hunger of the lions when they crouch in their dens or lie in wait in a thicket? Who provides food for the raven when its young cry out to God and wander about for lack of food? Do you know when the mountain goats give birth? Do you watch when the doe bears her fawn? Do you count the months till they bear? Do you know the time they give birth? They crouch down and bring forth their young; their labor pains are ended. Their young thrive and grow strong in the wilds; they leave and do not return. Who let the wild donkey go free? Who untied his ropes? I gave him the wasteland as his home, the salt flats as his habitat. He laughs at the commotion in the town; he does not hear a driver's shout. He ranges the hills for his pasture and searches for any green thing. `Will the wild ox consent to serve you? Will he stay by your manger at night? Can you hold him to the furrow with a harness? Will he till the valleys behind you? Will you rely on him for his great strength? Will you leave your heavy work to him? Can you trust him to bring in your grain and gather it to your threshing floor?`* Job can control none of the creatures. God ordains their every move.

How much less can Job control the birds of the air. *“The wings of the ostrich flap joyfully, but they cannot compare with the pinions and feathers of the stork. She lays her eggs on the ground and lets them warm in the sand, unmindful that a foot may crush them, that some wild animal may trample them. She treats her young harshly, as if they were not hers; she cares not that her labor was in vain, for God did not endow her with wisdom or give her a share of good sense. Yet when she spreads her feathers to run, she laughs at horse and rider.”* As far as the horses go, Job is no match for their great strength—especially those strong animals used by armies. *“Do you give the horse his strength or clothe his neck with a flowing mane? Do you make him leap like a locust, striking terror with his proud snorting? He paws fiercely, rejoicing in his strength, and charges into the fray. He laughs at fear, afraid of nothing; he does not shy away from the sword. The quiver rattles against his side, along with the flashing spear and lance. In frenzied excitement he eats up the ground; he cannot stand still when the trumpet sounds. At the blast of the trumpet he snorts, 'Aha!' He catches the scent of battle from afar, the shout of commanders and the battle cry.”* In verse 26, the final scene shifts to the raptors of the sky. *“Does the hawk take flight by your wisdom and spread his wings toward the south? Does the eagle soar at your command and build his nest on high? He dwells on a cliff and stays there at night; a rocky crag is his stronghold. From there he seeks out his food; his eyes detect it from afar. His young ones feast on blood, and where the slain are, there is he.”*

Job has been subdued—the first “fall” in the belt-wrestling ordeal is about to be decided.

The time has come for Job to admit defeat. Thus in verses 1-2 of Job 40, we read, “*The LORD said to Job: ‘Will the one who contends with the Almighty correct him? Let him who accuses God answer him!’*” Job has no choice but to cry “uncle.” Job’s wisdom is no match for the wisdom of God. What follows in verses 3-5, then, is that Job will no longer dispute with God as he had done throughout the latter stages of the dialogue with his friends, nor will Job demand to approach God as a prince, as he had done in the closing words of his final speech. Job has lost the contest. He is humbled but also assured. We read, “*Then Job answered the LORD: ‘I am unworthy—how can I reply to you? I put my hand over my mouth. I spoke once, but I have no answer—twice, but I will say no more.’*”

Job has not yet learned all that he needs to learn. He has lost the first fall in the belt-ordeal, but the match (which apparently includes two falls, not one) is not yet over. Job is ordered to take up the challenge again, to put his belt back on and to go one more round with YHWH. Job’s initial submission to YHWH is the beginning of true repentance, but Job must now fully recognize the unreasonableness and the sinfulness of criticizing his Creator.<sup>10</sup> In verses 6-7, the challenge is renewed. “*Then the LORD spoke to Job out of the storm: ‘Brace yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer me.’*” We can only imagine Job’s reaction to the news that the contest is not yet over.

Throughout the opening verses of chapter 40, the focus is on God’s sovereign work in redemption, often depicted throughout the Old Testament as YHWH’s outstretched hand. Job has no reason whatsoever to complain about how God does things. Yet in an eery way Job’s increasingly self-centered demand to be vindicated amounts to a kind of self-deification, the inevitable result of human sinfulness.<sup>11</sup> Because of human sin, God’s purposes, which are always good and true, even if we cannot see nor understand why, must somehow become subservient to the desires of sinful humans. This is Job’s great failure. In verses 8-14, the LORD says to Job, “*Would you discredit my justice? Would you condemn me to justify yourself? Do you have an arm like God’s, and can your voice thunder like his? Then adorn yourself with glory and splendor, and clothe yourself in honor and majesty. Unleash the fury of your wrath, look at every proud man and bring him low, look at every proud man and humble him, crush the wicked where they stand. Bury them all in the dust together; shroud their faces in the grave. Then I myself will admit to you that your own right hand can save you.*” If Job can do what God can do, then the Lord will worship him! Elihu was right—Job sought to justify himself rather than God. No, only God can justify himself, because only God is without sin. Job, the sinner, has no right to question the holy God.

YHWH’s second challenge moves in a different direction. How would Job fare against certain members of the animal kingdom? Beginning in verse 15, YHWH asks Job, “*Look at the behemoth, [the Hippo] which I made along with you and which feeds on grass like an ox. What strength he has in his loins, what power in the muscles of his belly! His tail sways like a cedar; the sinews of his thighs are close-knit. His bones are tubes of bronze, his limbs like rods of iron. He ranks first among the works of God, yet his Maker can approach him with his sword. The hills bring him their produce, and all the wild animals play nearby. Under the lotus plants he lies, hidden among the reeds in the marsh. The lotuses conceal him in their shadow; the poplars by the stream surround him. When the river rages, he is not alarmed; he is secure, though the Jordan should surge against his mouth. Can anyone capture him by*

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<sup>10</sup> Kline, “Job,” p. 487.

<sup>11</sup> Kline, “Job,” p. 488.

*the eyes, or trap him and pierce his nose?"* Job has no chance in a belt wrestling contest against the Hippo—it was common in the ancient world to depict animals in such contests with humans— and yet YHWH controls his every move.<sup>12</sup>

The same holds true for Leviathan, probably the crocodile. According to Job 41:1 and following, Job is asked, *"can you pull in the leviathan with a fishhook or tie down his tongue with a rope? Can you put a cord through his nose or pierce his jaw with a hook? Will he keep begging you for mercy? Will he speak to you with gentle words? Will he make an agreement with you for you to take him as your slave for life? Can you make a pet of him like a bird or put him on a leash for your girls? Will traders barter for him? Will they divide him up among the merchants? Can you fill his hide with harpoons or his head with fishing spears? If you lay a hand on him, you will remember the struggle and never do it again! Any hope of subduing him is false; the mere sight of him is overpowering. No one is fierce enough to rouse him. Who then is able to stand against me? Who has a claim against me that I must pay? Everything under heaven belongs to me"*—even the crocodile, who does the will of YHWH, not Job.

The crocodile is legendary in Job's day. *"I will not fail to speak of his limbs, his strength and his graceful form. Who can strip off his outer coat? Who would approach him with a bridle? Who dares open the doors of his mouth, ringed about with his fearsome teeth? His back has rows of shields tightly sealed together; each is so close to the next that no air can pass between. They are joined fast to one another; they cling together and cannot be parted. His snorting throws out flashes of light; his eyes are like the rays of dawn. Firebrands stream from his mouth; sparks of fire shoot out. Smoke pours from his nostrils as from a boiling pot over a fire of reeds. His breath sets coals ablaze, and flames dart from his mouth. Strength resides in his neck; dismay goes before him. The folds of his flesh are tightly joined; they are firm and immovable. His chest is hard as rock, hard as a lower millstone. When he rises up, the mighty are terrified; they retreat before his thrashing. The sword that reaches him has no effect, nor does the spear or the dart or the javelin. Iron he treats like straw and bronze like rotten wood. Arrows do not make him flee; slingstones are like chaff to him. A club seems to him but a piece of straw; he laughs at the rattling of the lance. His undersides are jagged potsherds, leaving a trail in the mud like a threshing sledge. He makes the depths churn like a boiling caldron and stirs up the sea like a pot of ointment. Behind him he leaves a glistening wake; one would think the deep had white hair. Nothing on earth is his equal—a creature without fear. He looks down on all that are haughty; he is king over all that are proud."*

In Job 40:8, YHWH asked Job—*Would you discredit my justice? Would you condemn me to justify yourself?* Now we see that God's mighty power and glorious works point Job beyond God's works, to God himself. God alone is good. His perfect righteousness is displayed in the heavens, on the earth and in the creatures. If God can do all of this and more, and since Job is bound by time and space as well as guilty for his own sins as well as Adam's, then surely he can now see the obvious—Job has no right to question the Almighty or his ways. Once understanding this to be the case, we can say that Job has learned true wisdom. And true wisdom tells Job that God is just in all his ways—even when Job does not understand, nor necessarily like, the things that God is doing. The God who created and sustains all things is surely mysterious to us. And yet, from the consideration of his works, we know that he is good.

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<sup>12</sup> Kline, "Job," p. 488.

It should be clear that Job's reply to YHWH's second challenge is quite the opposite of his heartfelt lament of chapter 3. Having gained the wisdom he needed, Job now freely acknowledges his sins in going too far in his effort to justify himself, rather than giving glory and honor to God, no matter what his circumstances.

What makes the words of Job 42:1-6 all the more amazing is that Job is still suffering and has not yet received the explanation for the nature of his trial by ordeal! God has not given Job the answer to his question "why?" which Job was certainly expecting. The answer we are given is that God's ways are not our ways, his thoughts are not ours. Do we hang constellations in space? Do we control the earth's creatures? To people without faith in Jesus Christ, this is not an answer. To people who know that Christ died for their sins and was raised for their justification, this is the perfect answer! If the righteous one suffered to save us from our sins, then who are we to question God or to act as though God knows nothing of our pain? Jesus Christ is the man of sorrows! Like us in every way, yet without sin.

As a man who trusted in the God of the promise, Job shows himself to be everything the Lord has said of him—upright and blameless. Job is a justified sinner, and a faithful servant of the covenant. Despite having lost everything, and going through such horrible suffering, Job refuses to curse God. Now, having gained true wisdom and being assured of God's favor, Job humbly repents of his sins. We read in the first six verses of Job 42: *"Then Job replied to the LORD: 'I know that you can do all things; no plan of yours can be thwarted. You asked, 'Who is this that obscures my counsel without knowledge?' Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know. 'You said, 'Listen now, and I will speak; I will question you, and you shall answer me.' My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you. Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes."* God has been with Job throughout his entire ordeal. Once God spoke from the storm, Job knows that to be true. He should have never doubted it, nor demanded his own vindication, even though he had the legal right to do so. Job knows that nothing can thwart God's will. Job did not know of what he spoke. Now he knows to keep silent. There is nothing left to say. For God in his grace has appeared to Job and reminded him of the wisdom of all God's ways. All of this has been too wonderful for Job to grasp. He knows that God can do all things and his ways are always righteous. There is only one response. "I despise myself. I repent in dust and ashes."

It is a fact of Scripture that there is no way that a true believer can encounter the living God without being undone by the guilt of their sin. At no time did God ever tell Job why he as suffered. Yet Job has his answer. For when God appears to Job from the midst of the storm, Job knows that God is with him, and for Job, that is enough.<sup>13</sup> For even as Job repents and despises his own actions, God is preparing to restore him beyond Job's wildest expectations. For as we will see next week, God always keeps his promises. Job's story, just as ours, must have a happy ending! Why? Because of the cross and the empty tomb. The Lord has taken away and the Lord will restore! Blessed be the name of the Lord!

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<sup>13</sup> Kline, "Job," p. 489.

## “The LORD Made Him Prosperous Again”

*Texts: Job 42:7-17; 1 Peter 1:3-9*

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The Book of Job is known for its happy ending. As we come to the final chapter of this great book, Job’s trial by ordeal blessedly comes to an end. Job’s good name, his great wealth and his loving family are restored to him. Job has successfully endured an intense and very difficult period of suffering without cursing God, nor blaming God for his troubles. Satan has been proven wrong and his attack upon the foundation of the gospel (the righteous ways of God) has utterly failed. Although Job is a justified sinner, he is YHWH’s blameless and upright servant after all. Job is not the self-centered opportunist who obeyed God only so that he would prosper, as Satan had falsely charged. Once everything Job had was taken away, Job still refused to curse God to his face, as Satan predicted. And so having successfully graduated from the school of suffering and then personally instructed by YHWH himself in the nature of true wisdom, Job’s ordeal finally comes to an end. The Lord restores to Job all of the things he has lost, and then some. God is indeed faithful to his covenant promise, his ways are proven righteous and just, and in his word alone is true wisdom to be found.

As we come to the end of the Book of Job, there is much for us to consider. We will concentrate on the final chapter (the epilogue) to the Book of Job (Job 42:7-17), in which we read of how God fulfills his promise to his servant Job, by restoring to him all of things he had lost during his trial by ordeal. Next time, we will tie up a number of the theological loose ends raised throughout the story of Job, including the difficult subject of the suffering of the righteous. As we have seen throughout our series on Job, the key point of application is simply this, “how are we to relate the story of Job in our own particular situations, should the Lord chose to bring suffering into our lives?” This requires a fair bit of explanation, something we will tackle next week, for in many ways, the Book of Job creates a number of theological loose ends, which we will attempt to tie together next week.

As we saw last time, it was an act of sheer grace when God spoke to Job from the midst of the great storm. Job was sick with a fever, suffering from sores all over his body, and thinking he was about to die, Job nearly crosses the line when he demanded that YHWH issue a written indictment against him and then treat him like a prince. It is simply amazing that God did not come to Job in judgment and confront him with a list of his sins. God did not answer any of Job’s specific questions about why all of this had come to pass, nor did God deal with Job as Job demanded. And yet after the Lord appeared to Job from the midst of the storm and spoke to him about the nature of true wisdom—which could be seen in all that God had made—Job knows that everything will be okay. Job is completely reassured. He knows that his Creator and Redeemer is not angry with him, even though Job had complained of being abandoned and throughout the course of the dialogue with his friends, Job repeatedly wondered out loud whether God was being just with him. No, the appearance of God to Job is an act of grace and blessedly brings Job’s ordeal to an end.

After losing all of his possessions and his children, we witnessed poor Job go from a humble affirmation of faith as recorded in Job 1:20-21: “*Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked I will depart.*”

*The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised,*” to the heartfelt lament of Job 3: *“May the day of my birth perish!”* Then we listened in as Job was on the receiving end of sincere but cruel counsel from his three friends Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar accused Job of having sinned, because they completely misunderstood the principle of divine retribution. In their minds, a simple syllogism explains Job’s troubles. God must punish all sin (true). Job is suffering horribly (true). Therefore, Job must have sinned (false). Since it is self-evident that the righteous suffer and that the wicked prosper, Job was easily able to silence his three friends whose faulty understanding of God’s justice prevented them from seeing the obvious. Yes, God must punish all sins, but not necessarily in this life. Despite the loss of everything including his good name, and despite his horrible physical condition, (his fever and his open sores) Job refused to curse God.

And yet the increasingly heated and intense dialogue between Job and his friends brought about a dramatic change in Job. While well within his rights to defend his honor against the cruel and false charges of his three friends that he had committed a whole list of secret sins, Job slowly but surely lost perspective on his own situation—which is the difficulty that all sufferers face as sickness, fever and lack of strength rob them of their endurance and their clarity of thought. It was not long before Job feared that God had abandoned him or was treating him unjustly. The efforts of his friends to “comfort” him, only served to make everything worse. But knowing that he had done nothing to bring about the covenant curses—as his friends had falsely charged—Job became increasingly demanding as he sought to be vindicated of this falsehood. In fact, by the time we come to Job’s final speech in chapters 29-31, he is demanding that God answer him on Job’s own terms and that he be treated like a prince. Job nearly crosses the line.

But before Job goes too far, a certain Elihu, a young man who has been listening to the debate from the beginning, now jumps into the fray. While reminding Job’s three friends of how completely they have failed in their attempts to deal with Job’s situation, more importantly Elihu’s speech points out to Job that he has gone way too far in seeking to justify himself, rather than God. Therefore, Elihu’s speech serves as the means by which the way is prepared for the Lord to come and speak to Job from the midst of the whirlwind. It is Elihu, speaking as a prophet, who reminds Job and his friends that true wisdom does not necessarily come from advanced age, personal experience, or even observation, but must be revealed to us by God. This is exactly what happens beginning in Job 38.

When the Lord speaks to Job as recorded in chapters 38-41, it is Job who is twice challenged to brace himself like a man. This is an athletic image drawn from the ancient world in which the goal is to best one’s opponent by removing their belt or else subduing them with it. Not surprisingly, it is Job who is quickly subdued and who loses the contest with his Creator/Redeemer over the nature of true wisdom. Speaking as the interpreter of his own work of creation, YHWH reminds Job that his wisdom is openly displayed in the heavens, on the earth, and in the creatures who populate both. It is God who hangs the stars in space. It is God who separates the day from the night. It is God who controls the seas and directs the storms. It is God who sends forth lightning and snow and rain.

And where was Job when God did all of these things? Job was nowhere to be seen. Job, is but a mere man, bound by both time and space. Therefore, when God directs Job to consider the creatures of the earth, the eagle, the horse, the ox, the behemoth (hippo) and leviathan (the crocodile), Job is confronted with the fact that he is no match for any of them, yet the Lord directs their every move and controls their every activity. Thus in Job 40:8-9, YHWH asks Job, *“Would you discredit my justice? Would you condemn me to justify yourself? Do you have an arm like God’s, and can your voice thunder like his?”* How can Job demand anything from God? Why would Job seek to justify himself rather than God?

Job's suffering does not give him the right to question God's justice.

When Job is finally confronted with the greatness of God, two things change dramatically. On the one hand, Job is immediately and completely humbled. Job has gone from demanding to be treated like a prince to repenting in dust and ashes. Notice, too, that Job is not consumed by God's holiness. Nor does God belittle Job, or mock him. But God does put Job in his place. Indeed, no one can be said to possess true wisdom unless they understand the distinction between the creature and the Creator! Once God speaks to Job from the midst of the storm, the Creator-creature distinction is something which Job of all men now fully understands! When God speaks, Job must listen. Here is the wisdom Job has been seeking all along. For unlike Job, God is neither bound by time or space, nor are his ways subject to human approval. The Scripture says that our God does whatever pleases him (Psalm 115:3). Therefore, his ways are always holy, righteous and good, even if we do not understand or even like them.

Yet, on the other hand, the very fact that God condescended to speak to Job, immediately puts Job's suffering into its proper perspective. Clearly, Job is not being punished because of some particular sin he has committed. But at no time does God ever reveal to Job the reason why he is suffering. At no point does YHWH answer Job's list of questions and demands. God's ways are not our ways. His thoughts are not our thoughts. No one can fathom him. But when Job is directed to the holiness and justice of God as seen in the glories of the natural order, Job realizes that such questions are futile and that God has been with him in the midst of his ordeal. God has not in any sense abandoned him. In fact, it was sinful of Job to even think such a thing. And this despite the fact that God never once answers any of Job's specific questions nor gives Job any explanation whatsoever as to why he is suffering. In fact, once God speaks to Job, none of that even matters. For having gained true wisdom, Job knows that God is good and that all his ways are just. Who is he to question God?

As we come to the end of Job's ordeal, we need to notice Job's reaction to God's appearance. Job is painfully aware of his great sinfulness. As we read in Job 42:1-6: *"Then Job replied to the LORD: 'I know that you can do all things; no plan of yours can be thwarted. You asked, 'Who is this that obscures my counsel without knowledge?' Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know. 'You said, 'Listen now, and I will speak; I will question you, and you shall answer me.' My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you. Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes.'"* No longer will Job seek to justify himself, rather than God. Only God can vindicate his ways since God alone is without sin. At the end of the day, there is nothing left for Job to say. All Job can do once he realizes the greatness of his sins is to despise himself and repent.

In the specific terms of the trial by ordeal—in which Satan had contended that once stripped of all of his wealth, his family and his health, Job would curse God to his face—Job has done nothing wrong to bring about his suffering and the loss of all of his possessions. But Job has become increasingly defiant as he seeks his own vindication before his friends. But who is Job to question YHWH? Who is Job to demand anything from God, especially when God in his grace, has condescended to speak to Job, reminding Job that he has never left his side? And all of this occurs, we must remember, before Job had actually been restored. Surely, this is intended to remind us that Job is a justified sinner who believes in the God of the promise, and who as a fruit of his faith, is the blameless and upright servant of the Lord, about whom it can be truly said that there is no one else like him on the earth. Most importantly, it means Job has now prevailed in the trial by ordeal. Job's ordeal is now over!

Thus, when Job repents of his sins the dialogue is now complete, and it is in the epilogue (Job 42:7-9) that we finally learn the outcome of the story. And it is a happy ending indeed.

**I**n Job 42:7-9, Job receives that vindication he has been seeking all along. God will restore his good name among his friends and by implication, to the citizens of Uz.

As we read the amazing account of Job's vindication and restoration, we need to notice the fact that this process takes place in the reverse order from which these things were originally lost.<sup>1</sup> The first (and probably most important) thing restored to Job is his good name and his reputation among his friends. It is only after Job's good name and reputation is regained, that his family and wealth are restored to him as well. In fact, we almost want to cheer when we read the words of verse 7, "*After the LORD had said these things to Job, he said to Eliphaz the Temanite, 'I am angry with you and your two friends, because you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has.'*" Not only does this mean that Job has spoken correctly about God—in the sense of not blaming God for his trial—it also means that Job's friends are finally confronted with their cruel and thoughtless behavior toward their suffering friend. But despite their folly—they never once entertained the thought that they might be wrong about God's justice and therefore, needed to repent—God is gracious to them as well as to Job.<sup>2</sup> They too will be forgiven.

When Job confesses his sins and performs this humble act of repentance, it appears as though he is finally doing what his friends told him to do all along—confess his sins so that God can restore him. But Job is not repenting of sins which he did not commit—things which his friends has accused him of doing. Rather, Job is repenting of those sins that he did commit once the ordeal began, namely those sins associated with trying to justify himself rather than God. At the end of the story, the verdict is clear—Job's three friends had spoken incorrectly and accused Job of things he did not do. They too need to repent in order to be restored.

God's gracious remedy to this matter is now spelled out in verses 8-9. "*So now take seven bulls and seven rams and go to my servant Job and sacrifice a burnt offering for yourselves. My servant Job will pray for you, and I will accept his prayer and not deal with you according to your folly. You have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has.'*" So Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Naamathite did what the LORD told them; and the LORD accepted Job's prayer." Job is now to serve as mediator on behalf of his three friends, by making a burnt offering sufficient to cover the guilt of all their sins. By acting as mediator for his friends, God will effect reconciliation. Job will not only be able to forgive his friends for what they have done, but he is vindicated in their eyes as well so that the friendship can be restored. When Job is chosen to be the one to pray for them another principle of redemptive history is brought out into the open. As we read elsewhere, the prayer of a righteous man turns aside God's anger toward the wicked (Proverbs 15:29). A clear example of this is found in Genesis 18:16 ff, when Abraham prays for the deliverance of Sodom.<sup>3</sup>

Since Job is that one chosen to offer the sacrifice on their behalf, he is not only vindicated in the eyes of his friends, but YHWH pointedly calls Job "my servant." This is covenantal language and confirms that

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<sup>1</sup> Kline, "Job," p. 489.

<sup>2</sup> Andersen, *Job*, p. 293.

<sup>3</sup> Andersen, *Job*, p. 293.

Job's victory over Satan in the trial by ordeal is finalized.<sup>4</sup> Through the burnt offerings, YHWH is reconciled to sinners, sinners are reconciled to YHWH, and the four sinners (Job and his three friends) are now reconciled to each other. This means that the foundation of the gospel is still intact—God is both just and righteous in all his dealings with his creatures—despite all of the plotting and scheming by Satan to undermine this principle through his attack upon God's righteous servant, Job. Job has been vindicated by God. God has vindicated himself. And Satan is shown to be a liar, who hates all righteous servants of the Lord.

**W**hile Job did not serve God so that he might prosper materially as Satan had charged, nevertheless, God's creation is good, and the blessing promised to God's people that the meek might inherit the earth comes to full flower in the life of Job.<sup>5</sup>

As the story comes to the final chapter, Job is still clothed in dirt and ashes. He is still sick and has nothing left of his great wealth and happiness. But all of that is about to change. While we have learned throughout the Book of Job that there is no direct connection whatsoever between someone's piety and their corresponding prosperity, nevertheless, God rewards Job for his faithfulness. God does this not because Job deserves anything from the hand of God—Job is and remains a justified sinner—but because God is gracious to his servant and because God always keeps his word.

The final turning point in the story now comes in verse 10, when we read that "*after Job had prayed for his friends, the LORD made him prosperous again and gave him twice as much as he had before.*" It is only when Job assumes his mediatorial office on behalf of his friends, that restoration finally comes. More importantly, we are pointed ahead in redemptive history to the coming messianic age and God's promise that his people will receive a double blessing.<sup>6</sup> In Isaiah 61:7 we read the following messianic prophecy. "*Instead of their shame my people will receive a double portion, and instead of disgrace they will rejoice in their inheritance; and so they will inherit a double portion in their land, and everlasting joy will be theirs.*" At this early point in redemptive history, the material blessings given to Job are but a type and shadow of heavenly blessings which are so much greater, that we have difficulty even conceiving of them. We can understand what it means to own great tracts of land, large herds of cattle, much gold and silver. But this side of the dawn of the age to come we cannot begin to comprehend the heavenly blessings which await God's people in heaven. Material blessings in this life are intended to illustrate spiritual blessings which we cannot see.

While Job receives a double portion, pointing us ahead to the spiritual blessings of the messianic age, we must be clear that the material blessings given him are not an end in themselves. This is what Satan mistakenly thought. These material blessings should point us ahead to something far greater. This is the principle set forth in 1 Peter 1:3-9, our New Testament lesson this morning when we read: "*Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade (unlike Job's possessions which were taken from him and then replaced)—kept in*

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<sup>4</sup> Kline, "Job," p. 489.

<sup>5</sup> Kline, "Job," p. 489.

<sup>6</sup> Both Kline and Andersen agree that it is not Job's repentance which begins the restoration, but the assumption of his role as mediator.

heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time." Notice that our ultimate inheritance is heavenly and yet to be revealed. In the meantime, we must wait and struggle. But we will receive our inheritance without fail. Why? Because God has promised as much!

Peter goes on to remind us, "in this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials." In this, Job serves as a wonderful example to us. "These have come so that your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls." Job's restoration is important because it serves as both his public vindication and as a powerful reminder that God keeps his promises. But Job's restoration cannot match the heavenly inheritance all of God's people will receive—an inheritance, the very thought of which, Peter declares, fills us with inexpressible and glorious joy. The restoration of Job's great wealth, points Job (as well as all of us who read his story) ahead to our heavenly inheritance.

But Job's restoration is important in its own right and is described for us in verses 11-17.

**B**As the story comes to an end, we read, "all his brothers and sisters and everyone who had known him before came and ate with him in his house. They comforted and consoled him over all the trouble the LORD had brought upon him, and each one gave him a piece of silver and a gold ring." No doubt, the restoration of Job's relationships with extended family and life-long friends is the sure sign that Job has been vindicated and that his good name has been restored to him. His reputation now, is at least as great as it was before his ordeal began. But no restoration would be complete without Job receiving the consolation and comfort from all his friends. The gifts which are given to Job probably indicate a recognition of the honor due to him, once people learned that his ordeal did not stem from some secret sin. And while nothing is said of Job's healing, we do read that his friends and families now comforted him, indicating that a time of healing and convalescence began in earnest.

The double portion promised to God's people can be seen beginning in verse 12. "The LORD blessed the latter part of Job's life more than the first. He had fourteen thousand sheep, six thousand camels, a thousand yoke of oxen and a thousand donkeys." This, of course, stands in contrast to the seven thousand sheep, the three thousand camels and the five hundred oxen and donkeys that Job had before this horrible trial by ordeal suddenly came upon him. It is safe to assume that Job sees his wealth with a new and even greater appreciation.

The same glorious restoration held true for Job's family. "And he also had seven sons and three daughters. The first daughter he named Jemimah, the second Keziah and the third Keren-Happuch. Nowhere in all the land were there found women as beautiful as Job's daughters, and their father granted them an inheritance along with their brothers." That Job's daughters are named here while his sons are not, may be a result of the fact that Job's daughters share in the inheritance of their brothers—a remarkable thing given the attitude toward women throughout the ancient world.<sup>7</sup> This not only implies that Job's family life was at least as happy afterwards as it was before his children were taken from him, but Job also has renewed hope that his deceased children are members of the covenant and will be raised

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<sup>7</sup> Andersen, *Job*, p. 294.

with him at the end of the age.<sup>8</sup> Job has already boldly confessed his belief in a bodily resurrection at the end of the age and in the fact that the Redeemer himself would stand upon the earth (Job 19.25-27).

The fact that Job lived such a long and full life after having suffered so much is clearly a sign that he probably lived during the age of the patriarchs, when long life was characteristic of men of faith.<sup>9</sup> And so God pours out his gifts on Job as gestures of God's amazing grace, not as a reward for certain virtues manifest in the life of Job.<sup>10</sup> All of this is done out in the open so that his vindication and reconciliation to God are not hidden.

The Book of Job ends with these wonderful words, "*After this, Job lived a hundred and forty years; he saw his children and their children to the fourth generation. And so he died, old and full of years.*" And the best response we can give to this declaration comes from Job himself—"blessed be the name of the Lord." For Job is now in the presence of the Lord, awaiting the day of resurrection, so that with his own eyes he will see his redeemer face to face. Amen!

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<sup>8</sup> Kline, "Job," pp. 489-490.

<sup>9</sup> Kline, "Job," pp. 489-490.

<sup>10</sup> Andersen, Job, p. 294.

## “How Can I Reply to You?”

*Texts: Job 40:1-14; Romans 8:28-39*

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The Book of Job is not only a great piece of literature, but as Francis Anderson points out, Job is truly God’s gift to humanity, while at the same time one of the supreme offerings of the human mind to the living God.<sup>1</sup> There is a reason why John Calvin preached one hundred and fifty-nine sermons on Job—there is a seemingly endless treasure of wisdom to be mined from its pages. Here in the Book of Job we find the account of a good and respected man who lived about the time of Abraham, who was nearly overwhelmed by the loss of all that he owned, who faced the death of all those whom he loved, who lost his health and his good name and who suffered all of this without knowing why. And yet, as a man of faith, Job refused to curse God or blame him for his troubles, before finally being restored and vindicated in the end. And while the Book of Job has a happy ending, the story of Job also raises a number of important (and daunting) theological questions for all who read it. Why do the righteous suffer? What can we learn from Job should God call us to suffer? And what can we learn from the story of Job to help should our friends and family suffer?

Having worked our way through the entire book, are we now in a position to draw some final conclusions and make some application. Throughout this series, a number of you have asked thoughtful questions about how the story of Job applies to Christians today or even to your own particular circumstances. The reason why we need to address these questions only after we have worked our way through the entire book, is simply because we cannot properly make application about the mystery of suffering until we have read the entire story of Job and placed his ordeal against the backdrop of redemptive history.

I recently heard someone cite from Eliphaz’s first speech to Job and recount how they used his words as biblical counsel to someone they knew who was suffering. Then they turned to Job’s words in Job 42:6—“*Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes*”—as the proof that Eliphaz’s counsel to Job was correct—Job needed to repent of his sins so that God would restore him. The suffering friend was told, “if only you would repent of your sins, like Job, God will end your suffering.” The problem is that, as a Christian, the poor sufferer had already repented of their sins, perhaps hundreds of times, and yet was still suffering! The only conclusion the sufferer could draw was that either God did not love them or did not hear their prayers, or else Christianity is simply not true—no one is home to answer their prayers. But there was one conclusion the sufferer should have drawn, but apparently did not. And that is his friend was quoting Eliphaz favorably because his friend was as every bit as cruel and bone-headed as Eliphaz was. In this case, the failure lies not with the sufferer, but with the counselor!

But if we know the entire Book of Job, we know that in Job 42:6, Job is not repenting for sins he did not commit so that God would restore him. Rather, Job was repenting for seeking to justify himself rather than God once his ordeal began! Furthermore, if we know the whole story of Job, we know that Job is easily able to silence Eliphaz, because of the self-evident fact that righteous people suffer and that

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<sup>1</sup> Andersen, *Job*, p. 15.

wicked people prosper. We also know that Eliphaz is easily silenced by the much younger Elihu. And we know that God rebukes Eliphaz for speaking improperly about God's altogether just and righteous ways, even as Job is vindicated. While Eliphaz correctly believed that the holy God must punish all sin, Eliphaz incorrectly jumped to the conclusion that Job was suffering because God was punishing him for some sin (secret or otherwise) which Job had supposedly committed. But you know this only if you take the time to read the whole book of Job and view Job's ordeal in light of the broader story of redemption.

There is nothing worse than when someone (no matter how well-intended) lifts passages like the speech from Eliphaz without regard to context or the big picture of redemptive history, and then uses such a passage as a club on the sufferer—"all you need to do is repent and your suffering will end." A number of you have told me similar stories, and many of the sufferers in our midst can recount similar counsel being given to them during the dark night of sickness and suffering. Many times people (with the best of intentions) feel like they have to provide answers and remedies for the suffering of others without having a clue as to why the sufferer is actually suffering. Such well-intended advice can become as cruel as the words of Eliphaz to his friend Job. This is why it is only after we have seen the big picture, read the entire story and put Job's ordeal in its proper place in redemptive history, that we are finally in a position to talk about application to our own particular situations today.

**T**he most important question raised throughout our series is this: "What can we learn from Job about the mystery of suffering?"

The answer is very simple—in the Book of Job, God never once gives Job an answer to this question, other than to point out to Job that YHWH is the creator and sustainer of all things, that he rules over all of creation, and that Job has no right whatsoever to question the ways of the Lord. To many (especially for those in the midst of suffering or to skeptics who doubt the Christian faith), this is no answer at all. But while we can empathize with the sufferer who wants to know "why me?" and while we reject the views of the skeptic, nevertheless, the fact remains, God will not be questioned by sinners. He is holy and we are not. He need not give us an answer.

As one wag once put it, when God appears to Job from the midst of the storm, we have something like Job being told to "sit down and shut up." This becomes perfectly clear in the first fourteen verses of Job 40. After Job had demanded a written indictment and to be treated as a prince, the Lord appears to Job from the midst of the storm. While this is an act of grace, because God does not confront Job with his sins, nevertheless, Job is put in his place. Thus when God speaks to Job, we read, "*The LORD said to Job: 'Will the one who contends with the Almighty correct him? Let him who accuses God answer him!'*" It is God who now questions Job, since Job has no right to question God!

The litany of questions God asks of Job as recorded in Job 38-41 is one of the remarkable passages in all the Bible. Where was Job when God created the world and hung the stars into space? Where was Job when God separated the day from the night, or set the boundaries for the ocean? Job is but a mere man. A sinful (albeit justified) man at that. YHWH has him by the belt and has completely subdued him! As God speaks to Job we are reminded that God's ways are not our ways. His thoughts are not our thoughts. No one can fathom him. Like Job, we are bound by time and space. But God is not. Like Job, we too are confronted with the questions asked of him by YHWH: "*Have you comprehended the vast expanses of the earth? Tell me, if you know all this. What is the way to the abode of light? And where does darkness reside? Can you take them to their places? Do you know the paths to their dwellings? Surely you know, for you were already born! You have lived so many years!*" The creature is not the Creator. Grasping this fact is the beginning of true wisdom!

There is only one thing for Job to say in response. In Job 40:3, *“Then Job answered the LORD: ‘I am unworthy-how can I reply to you? I put my hand over my mouth. I spoke once, but I have no answer-twice, but I will say no more.’”* Even though there is nothing he can say, it is enough for Job to know that YHWH was not angry at him and that the Lord would graciously condescend to speak to him. And yet, as we see in verses 6 and following, there was much more for Job to learn: *“Then the LORD spoke to Job out of the storm: ‘Brace yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer me. ‘Would you discredit my justice? Would you condemn me to justify yourself? Do you have an arm like God’s, and can your voice thunder like his? Then adorn yourself with glory and splendor, and clothe yourself in honor and majesty. Unleash the fury of your wrath, look at every proud man and bring him low, look at every proud man and humble him, crush the wicked where they stand. Bury them all in the dust together; shroud their faces in the grave. Then I myself will admit to you that your own right hand can save you.’”* Only God can vindicate himself, since only God is holy. The sins for which Job repents in ashes and dust were not the sins of which he had been unjustly accused of having committed by his three friends. Rather, Job repents for having questioned God’s justice toward him. But Job gets no answer whatsoever to his question, “why me?” Once God appears to Job from the storm, the question just goes away.

On one level then, the answer we get from the Book of Job about the mystery of suffering is that God is holy, we are not, and we are not to question God’s ways. Just as God will not be questioned by Job, so too, God will not be questioned by any sinful creature—including us. As Paul puts it in Romans 9:20, *“who are you, O man to talk back to God?”* We might say that trying to find the answer to the question of human suffering by looking directly to the God of the whirlwind, is like trying to understand the sun by staring at it for hours upon hours. It is too much for us. We are blinded. Creatures cannot understand the ways of the creator, because God is simply too far beyond our comprehension.

Yet on another level there is a very profound and wonderful answer to the mystery of suffering hinted at throughout the story of Job. Unlike Job, we do not have to deal with the God in the whirlwind! As Job’s ordeal unfolds, Job slowly comes to see that he needs God’s wisdom both to understand and to accept what has happened to him. As his suffering drags on, Job realizes that what is truly needed is a mediator—someone who will argue his case before the sovereign God of the storm. Recall that in Job 9:33, we read Job’s lament: *“If only there were someone to arbitrate between us, to lay his hand upon us both.”* In Job 16:20, we find these words, *“My intercessor is my friend as my eyes pour out tears to God.”* Then we read the amazing confession of faith from Job 19:25: *“I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth.”* Finally, in Job 33:23, we read, *“Yet if there is an angel on his side as a mediator, one out of a thousand, to tell a man what is right for him.”* Having gained true wisdom, Job points us in the right direction, and although he himself encountered God in the whirlwind, given our place in redemptive history, we don’t have to face God in the storm. Rather, we encounter God through the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, the man of sorrows.

It is clear from the story of Job that we cannot see God, nor even begin to understand his mysterious ways, unless and until we seek divine wisdom in Holy Scripture. Such divine wisdom is to be found in the mediator of whom Job was speaking, our Lord Jesus Christ, who is the wisdom of God incarnate. In fact, when placed in the context of the larger drama of redemptive history, Job’s trial by ordeal itself becomes one important key to the resolution of the mystery of suffering. It was YHWH who brought Job to Satan’s attention. It was Satan who took the bait and afflicted Job. And it was Job who emerged from the trial by ordeal victorious. All of this points us ahead as type and in shadow to the life of Jesus Christ—the greater Job yet to come. Not only was Jesus tempted by the devil, but Jesus endured both the shame from and rejection of his people before he suffered to the point of death. But unlike Job, Jesus was without sin. Job the sinner could not complain because even though he was justified and had done

nothing to bring about the ordeal he would face, Job was in no place to challenge the purposes of God.

But Jesus Christ—the holy one of God—deserved none of things he received. We ought to take note of a pattern in Job’s ordeal which later comes to full flower in the gospel. Job made burnt offerings on behalf of his children, and then later for his friends. But Jesus offered the supreme sacrifice for sin—namely himself. Our guilt was imputed to Jesus and it is through his perfect obedience in the midst of his trial by ordeal, that we are saved from sin’s guilt, its power over us is broken and we are reckoned or accounted as righteous. Thus in Jesus Christ, we have the very thing Job saw was needed, but did not have—a mediator. The practical consequence of this is vital to see. We need not encounter the God in the storm! No, God graciously comes to us in the person of Jesus Christ—the man of sorrows—who has suffered in all ways as have we, who makes intercession for us in times of trial, and who pours out the Holy Spirit into our hearts, so that we are guaranteed the redemption of our bodies. In this, the wisdom of God is wonderfully displayed for all of God’s people to see in the doing and dying of Jesus.

Therefore, while God never tells us why we suffer, he does tell us that there is a reason for our suffering—a reason perhaps known only to himself. In fact, the universal pattern of redemptive history demonstrates that whenever God brings suffering into the lives of his people, it always followed by a glorious restoration. God has revealed this pattern to us in the life, death and resurrection of his own dear son. For as Jesus—the greater Job—suffered and died, so too, Jesus rose again from the dead, completely victorious, and is now crowned King of Kings and Lord of Lords. And through our union with Jesus Christ through faith and through the bond created between us by the Holy Spirit, Jesus’ victory over death and the grave is ours. The lesser Job was a justified sinner. But he was also blameless and upright. Yet Job suffered horribly, before receiving a glorious vindication and restoration in the end. The greater Job, Jesus, is without sin and yet suffered far more than did Job before being raised from the dead and ascending on high, where our Lord lives to make intercession for us, his people.

We have the very thing Job longed for—an intercessor in times of trial. But what Job did not anticipate is that our heavenly intercessor is a fellow sufferer, someone who knows both the meaning of suffering and the glories which lie ahead for all those for whom he intercedes. Thus as we suffer, our intercessor can not only empathize with us as a fellow-sufferer, as God in human flesh he has the power to ensure we will share in his glorious victory. Job longed for the very thing we so easily take for granted.

While the “why?” question is never answered, nevertheless, there is a resolution of the mystery. The suffering of God’s people will—either in this life or in the next—lead to a glorious victory and to an inheritance which so far surpasses human understanding that we cannot conceive of it. How do we know this to be true, when the God of the whirlwind is so far beyond our ways and our thoughts that we cannot possibly conceive of his greatness? We know this because the God of whirlwind took on human flesh and came to die on a cross before being raised from the dead. The pattern is clearly established in the gospel. The ordeal of the cross and suffering the goes with it, must precede the victory of the resurrection. Why? Because this is how God redeems us from the guilt and power of sin, and why it is utterly foolish to talk about the mystery of suffering without looking at the big picture, of which the story of Job is an important part, and which ultimately directs us to the life and death of Jesus Christ.

Indeed, it is only after Jesus Christ has come and fulfilled all righteousness through his own suffering and resurrection, that the words of Paul in Romans 8:28-39 finally make any sense and bring true comfort. *“And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.”* Nothing happens by chance. God works all things for good—even things which might be sinful and horrible in themselves. God can and does turn all things to good—not just

some things. And unlike Eliphaz, we need to see that this might not come to pass until the next life. This becomes clear in the balance of Paul's doxology. *"For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified."* God does not start the process—which may include suffering—and then quit in the middle. *"What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen?"* If true, this means we do not suffer because we have committed some particular sin. We might suffer because of the consequences of our actions—but God is not about the business of punishing us retributively or exacting revenge.

In fact Paul goes on to say, *"it is God who justifies. Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died – more than that, who was raised to life – is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: 'For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.' No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."* There is no circumstance, no situation, which is beyond God's control and presence. The God of the whirlwind does not approach us in the storm, but in the person of Jesus Christ, who loved us and gave himself for us. And this is where the story of Job ultimately directs us, for in Jesus Christ are all the mysteries of suffering resolved.

**W**ith that question dealt with, we can turn to the second question, "what can the sufferer learn from Job?"

In the suffering and ordeal of Job we meet a real-life flesh and blood sufferer, who has moments of great faith (in which he serves as a wonderful example to us), and yet who becomes increasingly embittered and self-righteous over the course of his ordeal (matters about which Job provides us with a much more negative example). Thus when we look to the life of Job for guidance as to what to do when we suffer, we need to keep these facts in mind—there are things in the life of Job to emulate and things in the response of Job to avoid. But the most important thing we need to keep in mind is that the role Job's ordeal by suffering plays is very important and unique in redemptive history, and that his suffering (at least as to the reason why Job suffers) is unlike anything we will face.

It is YHWH who calls Satan's attention to Job, YHWH's blameless and upright servant. When Satan sees an opportunity to undermine the foundation of the gospel (God's just and righteous ways in dealing with all his creatures), Satan takes the bait and seeks permission to afflict the man (Job) who is the apple of God's eye. When Job endures the trial, a very important principle is established. God is not a cosmic blackmailer—"obey me and I'll make you rich"—nor is Job a hypocrite who obeys God only to gain health, wealth and prosperity. Despite the loss of everything, Job refuses to curse God or blame him for his ordeal. All of this is intended to point us ahead to the coming of Jesus Christ, who will fully and finally defeat the Devil when Jesus suffers and dies upon the cross (Colossians 2:15).

We live in an age in which Satan is not only an already defeated foe, but he has been cast down from heaven and, according to Revelation 20:1-10, is confined to the abyss, where he is prevented from deceiving the nations, because the preaching of the gospel is said to "bind him." What this means for us is that Satan no longer has access to the throne of God to accuse us, as he did in the days of Job (or of

Zechariah, the prophet). When we suffer, it is not because the Devil has made a deal with God to test our allegiance. Satan can no longer do such a thing. When we suffer it is not because the Devil is afflicting us, but because God allows it (for reasons he may or may not chose to reveal to us). Nor does our own faithfulness in times of trial help to establish the truth of the gospel (as did Job's), nor does any lack of faithfulness on our part undermine the gospel. To put it bluntly—while God cares greatly about each one of us when we suffer—we are not that important! Christ has already defeated Satan and any obedience or faithfulness we muster, surely serves as a glorious vindication of God's righteous ways.

That being said, when Job is first afflicted, we read, *“At this, Job got up and tore his robe and shaved his head. Then he fell to the ground in worship and said: ‘Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised. In all this, Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing.’”* The most important way in which Job serves as an example to us when we suffer is when he refuses to blame God and acknowledges that God can do with us as he wills. This anticipates the prayer of Jesus in Gethsemane, recorded in Matthew 26:39, *“Yet not as I will, but as you will.”* This should be our prayer, whenever suffering comes.

We should also learn from the story of Job, that it is a sin to seek to justify ourselves rather than God. As we watch poor Job become increasingly concerned with the loss of his good name when he had done nothing wrong, he finally gets to the place where he is demanding that God answer him, and that God treat him as a prince. This is something we must strive to avoid whenever suffering comes. The grim reality of suffering is that it is very easy for the sufferer to do exactly what Job did. Nothing chips away at the proper perspective on these matters as does sickness, pain and grief. And while we have every right to ask of God that our good name be vindicated, the way we should seek the vindication of ourselves is to defend the rights of God to do with us whatever he wishes, with the expectation that he will keep his promise to vindicate us in the end. But even here, the focus should fall on the faithfulness of God, not upon our rights to be delivered or vindicated.

All of this means that the time to prepare for suffering is before suffering comes. For once suffering comes upon us it is very easy to lose all perspective on these things and to fall into despair or bitterness. It also means that the sufferer—who will go through times of despair, doubt, complaint, and self-pity—remains justified. What does this mean for us? It means that Jesus Christ was the perfect sufferer, who never doubted, complained or pitied himself. When we trust in Christ, his perfect suffering is imputed to us, so that God sees us not as a doubting, complaining, demanding, self-pitiers, but as someone who always prays, *“Not my will, but thine will be done.”* Furthermore, the one in whom we trust and whose righteousness we receive through faith, is a fellow-sufferer, who has suffered far more than any man living has suffered. Not only does he empathize with us in our trials and will never abandon us, but Jesus himself has promised us that he will never give us more than we can bear, and that he will always provide us with a way of escape (1 Corinthians 10:13). This then, is what we should learn from the suffering of Job. Job points us ahead to Jesus Christ, the perfect sufferer.

Last, what can the friends and family of the sufferer learn from Job?

**L**One thing should be perfectly clear—having read the words of Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar, we now know what not to tell someone who is suffering! There is no direct connection between the degree of someone's suffering and their sins and we cannot leap to such conclusions. Yes, there are times when it is perfectly clear why someone is suffering. Someone who does something stupid or sinful might end up paying the consequences for their actions. Someone who drinks and drives might go through tragedy. Someone who cheats on their spouse, might ruin their life and destroy their family. Someone who

smokes might get lung cancer. Yes, in some cases there is a cause and effect relationship between a person's behavior and suffering. But in most cases when people are called to suffer, there is no such observable connection. This is especially the case in the lives of the righteous (justified sinners), who like Job, have done nothing to bring down covenant curses upon their heads. Only God knows why such people must endure trial. We do not and should not presume to speak to such things.

Yet, in one sense, Job's friends serve as a wonderful example of what to do when someone we love suffers. Recall that when Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar, learned of Job's suffering, we read of them—*“they set out from their homes and met together by agreement to go and sympathize with him and comfort [Job]. When they saw him from a distance, they could hardly recognize him; they began to weep aloud, and they tore their robes and sprinkled dust on their heads. Then they sat on the ground with him for seven days and seven nights. No one said a word to him, because they saw how great his suffering was.”* Had they kept silent and continued to comfort their suffering friend, they would have helped Job greatly. But after Job's lament (Job 3), they were no longer concerned with comforting Job, they became preoccupied with correcting Job. So much so, they cruelly applied to Job their flawed view of God's justice. Instead of comforting Job, they were soon accusing him of certain sins. This we cannot do.

And yet, what is the first thought people have when something horrible happens? “What did I do that made God mad at me?” While it is my sacred duty as a minister of the gospel to serve as the absolver of sins, every Christian participates in the priesthood of Christ and is, therefore, perfectly capable of declaring to a suffering Christian that whatever the reason for their suffering may be, if they are in Christ, their sins are forgiven and God is not retributively punishing them. This is why James connects healing with forgiveness and why he exhorts sufferers to ask for the elders to come and pray for them (James 5:7-16). As James tells us, *“The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.”* First and foremost, sick people and sufferers need to be assured of God's favor. They do not need to be accused of sinning!

At the end of the day we have no business whatsoever trying to figure out why someone is suffering and then informing them of our opinions on the matter. We cannot do what Eliphaz did and bombard the sufferer with what we think are the reasons for their suffering and then “confront” them with what they can do to change the will of God. This is not helpful, it is cruel. If we learn one thing from the story of Job it is that God alone knows why he does what he does and God alone has the power to turn suffering to good. As creatures, we cannot speak for God, nor do we hold the keys to the resolution of the mystery of suffering. Christ does. Most times it is better to just be silent, content to be with the sufferer, so that they are not alone in times of suffering and despair—unless of course, they prefer to left alone.

God's people are to comfort the sufferer by praying for them, by reminding them of the promises of God from holy Scripture (including the forgiveness of sins and the glories of our inheritance in Christ), and by showing the kind of compassion which eliminates the hardships of their suffering as much as is humanly possible. Nothing helps the sick and the suffering any more than helping them with the worries of life: watching the kids, preparing meals, providing transportation, helping them find work, and so on. What the sufferer needs is a word of comfort, someone to listen to them, someone who will just quietly sit with them—like Job's friends did at the beginning. All of these things are vital to aid the sufferer and it is our joyful duty to serve our brothers and sisters in Christ in such ways, whenever they are called to suffer.

No one wants to suffer. But we will. Like Job, all we can say to God when suffering comes is, “how can I reply to you?” But we also pray as Jesus did, “not my will, but your will be done.” And yet, unlike Job, we do not find God in furies of the storm. We find him in the person of his own dear son, Jesus Christ, who is the man of sorrows and the great physician, and who has loved us and gave himself for us.

For he is the greater Job and he will never leave us nor forsake—even in our darkest hour. And it is to Jesus Christ, that the Book of Job ultimately directs our gaze. For Job knew full well that his redeemer lives! Amen!